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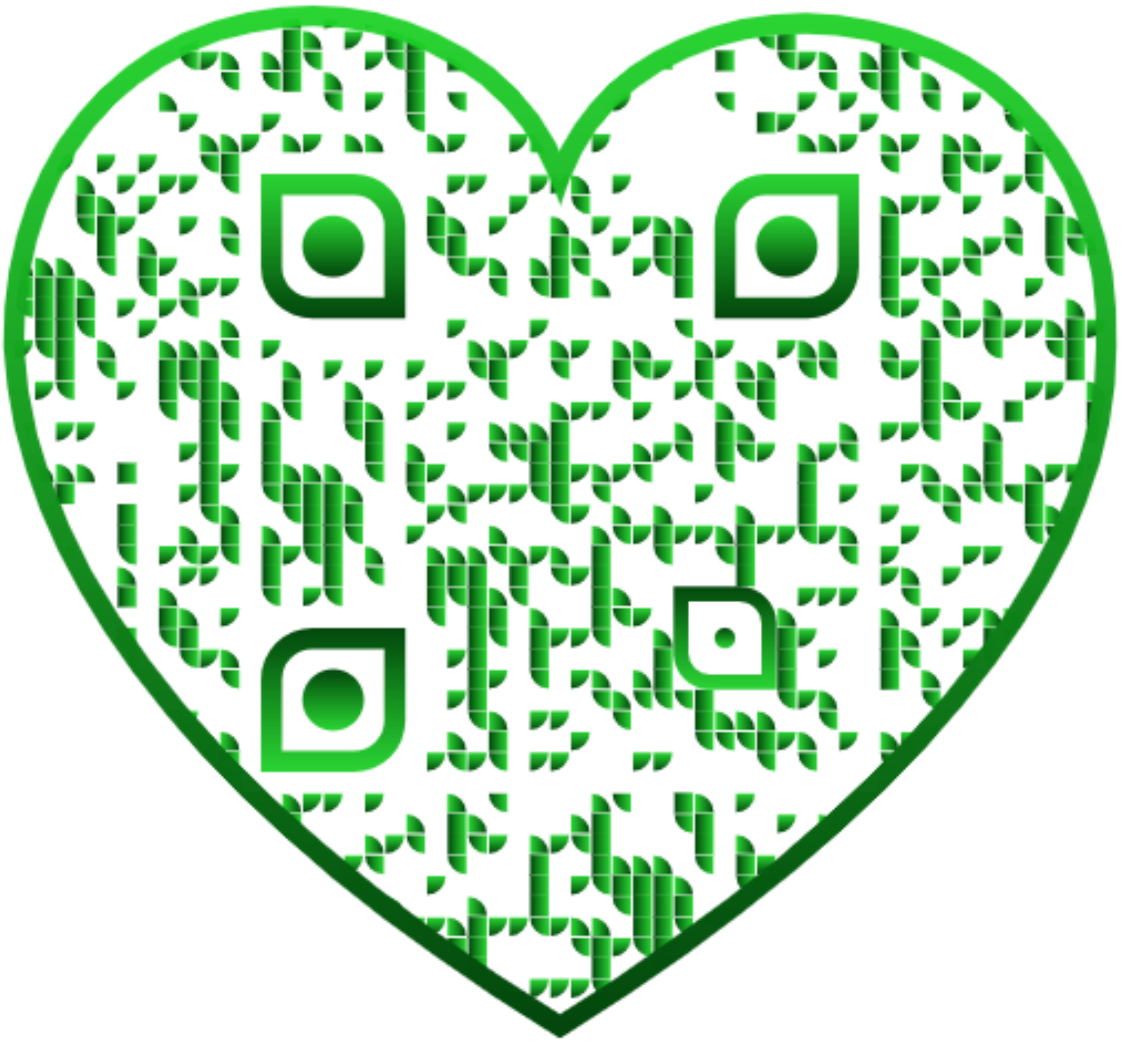

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Here's to the little guy!

While scouring the internet for definitions of the term 'boutique', I found the following: "A business serving a sophisticated or specialised clientele." The word's origins come from the mid-18th Century French for a small shop, via Latin, from the Greek word for 'storehouse'. In our industry, it's not uncommon to hear people refer to 'boutique tone', 'boutique build quality' or 'boutique pricing'.

Yet it's perhaps 'small shop' that hits the proverbial nail on the head. So many musicians go boutique for their guitars, amps and effects these days as it seems to imply a more personal, tailored level of service than that offered by the big guns.

While we were assembling a pile of 'boutique' gear from either side of the pond for review in this issue it quickly became clear that the word needn't be synonymous with high-dollar pricing either – check out this month's review section from page 52 onwards and you'll find a wide range of inspiring products, many of which represent fantastic value for money and are available to order tweaked to your personal specifications.

All that said, the key to sonic satisfaction is knowing what kind of sound you want to achieve in the first place, and there's no greater lesson in effective simplicity than that offered by the late, great Scotty Moore. Everyone at the mag was deeply saddened to hear of his passing, but we hope you enjoy our special tribute from page 24 onwards to a man whose guitar really did shake the world. See you next month...

Chris

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Turn to **page 28** to take advantage of this month's special *Guitar & Bass* subscription offer.

In this issue...

MEET THE EXPERTS...

HUW PRICE

Our senior product specialist spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 8.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.

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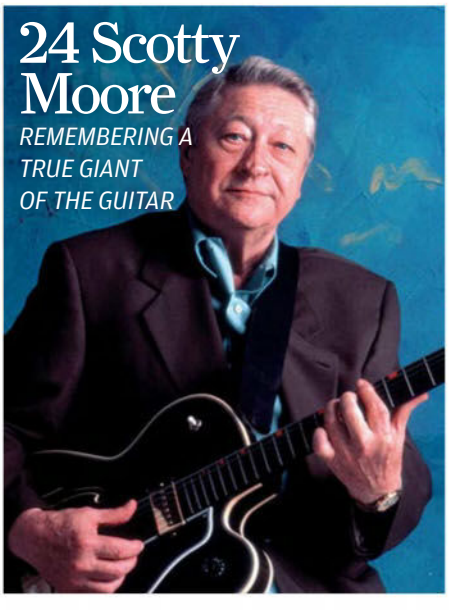
K-Line, Hamstead, Patrick James Eggle, Motion Custom Works, Swart, J Rockett & more reviewed...



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ONES TO WATCH

If you go down to the woods today...

BEAR'S DEN

With a debut album that sold 50,000 copies and earned the band an Ivor Novello Award nomination for its poignant, considered songwriting under their belt, Bear's Den weren't about to rest on their collective laurels. As soon as touring duties for *Islands* were complete, the London band decamped to the Netherlands for an intensive four-week writing spree before recording at Rockfield Studios in South Wales with producer Ian Grimble. The result is *Red Earth & Pouring Rain*, a record that also demonstrates a band not prepared to tread water stylistically.

While *Islands*, released in 2014, saw the band focusing on emotive folky Americana with regal brass adornments, this time round, guitarist/vocalist Andrew Davie and multi-instrumentalist Kev Jones paint with a broader sonic palette, creating widescreen music that evokes the great American open road and classic-rock acts such as Fleetwood Mac and Bruce Springsteen.

"It was both conscious and unconscious," says Jones of the decision to take the second record in a different direction. "A lot of conversations happened preceding that album and there was a lot of time on the road to talk about what was interesting us musically. Fundamentally, it came down to what we wanted the second album to feel like. Rather than 'let's go for Bruce Springsteen' or something, it was 'can you drive at night to it and put the entire record on and go for a road trip?'

"We wanted to have a certain nostalgia around the record that's lyrical as well as sonic. We wanted to make it quite cinematic." The pair had been musical partners for a decade prior to forming Bear's Den, when Jones says they set out with a carefully formed plan of attack.

"Me and Davie had been working on and off for 10 years together and started a band called Cherbourg maybe eight years ago. That went okay, but we were still learning, so we took a year out, went for a coffee and said 'let's do this again'. We spent a lot of time talking about what we were going to try to achieve before we picked up an instrument. We're so lucky. Everything's felt very gradual rather than an overnight thing. For the first album, we'd done quite a lot of groundwork, and we've got a strong work ethic.

"When we started, headlining Shepherd's Bush Empire was our dream, and we did that a year ago. We're not the sort of band who think 'we must headline Glastonbury', but creatively, we want to make sure we're constantly challenging each other and being dynamic and not sitting in a particular channel. Creatively, we're very ambitious."

Analogue approach

That creative ambition is certainly in evidence on *Red Earth & Pouring Rain*. "Rockfield was pretty wonderful and pretty intense," says Jones. "We did the main body of the tracking in six weeks. All the analogue gear suited what we were going for sonically. We were doing 15- or 16-hour days and had about two evenings off the entire time.

"The first record is a culmination of songs written over a period of years and the second record is a culmination of songs written in one month and recorded in six weeks. We had lots of vintage gear in the studio and Ian was very well educated in recording techniques from the 60s, 70s and 80s. We went for a very authentic approach – everything's analogue, all the synths are originals and the guitars are vintage. I feel that comes across on the record."

The build-up to the second album also saw Bear's Den become a duo as guitarist Joey Haynes departed and Jones left his drummer's stool to return to his roots as a guitarist and bassist. Live, they're a six-piece, augmented by a group of talented instrument-swapping friends. "One of the things we initially set out to do was create a band that was full of multi-instrumentalists," says Jones, "so it's about who has the best idea on an instrument at the time. I've been the drummer up until this album, out of necessity. I learnt drums because we felt like we needed a certain kind of drummer, but we realised for the second record we needed a completely different set of skills."

With festival shows at Glastonbury and Latitude ticked off, attention turns to a UK tour that will see the band play the 4,900-capacity Brixton Academy for the first time, eclipsing that Shepherd's Bush ambition, and Jones is confident the band's sound will be big enough to do the legendary south London venue justice. "We're a six-piece now for standard shows, and we love getting horn sections in. We've got a lot of good session friends who play with us, so we've spent time re-imagining the first record, and also the second album is bigger and needs more hands. It's been great to have those pairs of hands and realise the album live in a deeper way than we were able to as a smaller unit.

"We found this old oil tank outside Rockfield, and a lot of the percussion sounds on the album were just us smacking a big piece of metal with oil in it! So we're going to try to find something like that and take that on the road with us."

A long-held desire to own a Les Paul was ticked off Jones' bucket list on a trip to Nashville, and that guitar is a central instrument on *Red Earth & Pouring Rain*. "I've always wanted a Les Paul," he says. "It's a '79 Silverburst that I got from Gruhn Guitars. She's gorgeous and a bit battered up. I've got a '78 Precision Bass that I love, too, it's just perfect. Those are my two primary instruments and a Martin, and I've just bought a National Resonator. I run it all through a Marshall Bluesbreaker. We were going through Hiwatts in the studio. I'd love to get hold of one, but I haven't been able to afford it – we'll get there..." **GW**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Bruce Springsteen, The War On Drugs*

GEAR *Bear's Den*

- **GUITARS** 1974 Guild Starfire, Gibson Hummingbird, Deering banjos, Martin D-15M (Davie), 1979 Les Paul Silverburst, 1978 Precision Bass, National Style O Resonator, Fender B-Bender Telecaster (Kev)
- **PEDALS** Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail, Walrus Audio and Strymon pedals (Davie), Origin Effects Cali76, Klone, Strymon Flint, Fulltone Fat-Boost, Tech 21 SansAmp (Kev)
- **AMPLIFIERS** Roland JC-120 (Davie), 70s Hiwatt, '66 Ampeg Portaflex (Kev)

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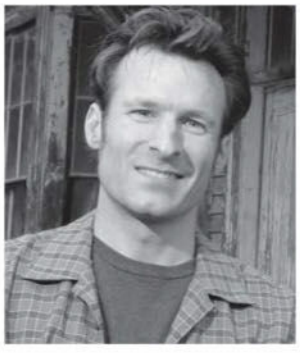
Letters from America

Peter Malinoski's guitars are unique works of art, but they're built to be played. **DAVE HUNTER** gets his hands on the striking Sonic #272



DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

Please don't call Peter Malinoski's instruments 'art-guitars'. Make no mistake, Malinoski is a genuine artist – with a degree to prove it. He paints, and he applies his Masters in Fine Arts and Woodworking to creating sculpture, art-furniture and, yes, art-guitars. But his guitar-guitars are musical instruments. They may look different from 99.9 per cent of the herd, but they are made to be played.

A bassist who has also learned to play the guitar, Malinoski made his first instrument more than 30 years ago, when he couldn't find the characteristics he was seeking in any of the commercially available models. Take one look at any of his creations, and you pretty quickly get the idea why this might have been. I have rarely seen so many original ingredients and construction methods employed in one guitar, or at least one that still outwardly resembles a traditional guitar.

Body shapes, woods and construction techniques; neck/body and headstock joints; headstocks themselves; neck construction and neck and fingerboard woods used; pickups and electronics – all are unlike virtually anything else you'll find out there. Only the hardware, in many cases, is in any way conventional; simply because good hardware exists, it does the job and it's convenient to use.

Over the past 30 years, while also working as an artist in other capacities, Malinoski has built upwards of 282 guitars in his Maryland workshop (he expects to hit 300 by the end of the year). All are one-of-a-kind guitars, built one at a time, and although many follow broadly consistent 'model' specifications, no two are ever entirely the same.

Sonic #272 has a stellar playing feel, intimate responsiveness and extremely dynamic tone

Having admired Peter's craftsmanship from afar for many years, I was expecting something a little quirky, with perhaps a slightly temperamental or effete playing feel, and rather, let's say, esoteric sonic characteristics. I was way off the mark on all counts. Sonic #272 might have 'quirky' looks, sure, depending on how you define that, and was born of an unconventional approach to the building process, but it has a stellar playing feel, a startlingly intimate responsiveness and an extremely dynamic and expressive tone...

The 25.5-inch scale Sonic is, in broad terms, Malinoski's take on the super-S-type, and while the results can take you somewhere very different, it's surprising how easily this guitar produces appealing renditions of those tones when you need them. This one was made with a Spanish cedar back and a curly maple top, with a curly maple neck and wenge fingerboard. The pickups and electronics are mounted on a quilted maple 'plate', another of which covers the back access to the vibrato-spring cavity. All wood is finished in a stained and hand-rubbed oil process, or just the latter for the natural pieces. Now, Malinoski's unique neck construction requires further exploration, but it's worth hearing from the creator first. Note that his views turn most conventions regarding 'tonewoods' and the proportional influence of neck and body on their ear, but he expounds his logic very well.

"A lot of people go on and on about the body wood 'tone' – oh, how I hate the word 'tone'," Malinoski tells me, "but it is

The trio of Malinoski pickups and the electronics are housed on a quilted maple plate

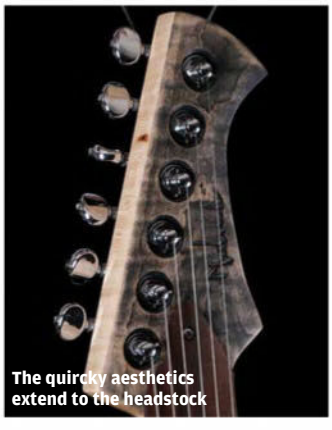
© Peter Malinoski

KEY FEATURES

Malinoski Sonic #272

- **PRICE** Approximately £1,900 as reviewed, excluding shipping and duties
- **BODY** Spanish cedar back, curly maple top
- **NECK** Glued and screwed-in curly maple neck with scarf-jointed headstock
- **FINGERBOARD** Wenge, 9" radius, 1 11/16" width at nut
- **FRETS** 24 Jescar 47104 (medium-jumbo)
- **PICKUPS** Malinoski Type 2 Humbucker neck, Type 12 Humbucker middle, Type P-42 Single Coil bridge
- **ELECTRONICS** Master volume and tone controls, five-way selector, push-pull tone pot for humbucker splitting
- **FINISH** Hand-rubbed, stained and oiled
- **HARDWARE** Hipshot US Contour vibrato bridge, Hipshot locking tuners
- **STRINGS** D'Addario 0.010–0.046
- **WEIGHT** 7.5lbs
- **CONTACT** malinoskiguitar.com petermalinoskiart@yahoo.com

Sonic #272 was built with a wenge fingerboard


The quircky aesthetics extend to the headstock

Access to the vibrato-spring cavity is via a second quilted maple plate

really all about the neck. The body is just a big anchor for the neck, and it being the biggest piece is going to have the lesser effect on the 'tone', whereas the smaller piece – the neck, which also has the most stress and tension on it – is going to have the greater effect. My guitars are different because my necks are different. With a bigger fretboard and scarfed head, there are three approximately equivalent masses of wood: neck, fretboard and head, making a strong, sweet and even-sounding instrument."

A look at the back of the Sonic reveals a scarf joint further down the neck than most, and walnut plugs helping to join the headstock end of the scarf to the fingerboard. Similar, if larger, plugs are seen at the body end of the neck. In fact, this joint is both glued and screwed, as it were. Other aspects of the Malinoski neck include a dual-action truss rod with carbon reinforcing rods, and a propensity for 24-fret fingerboards, as on this one.

The Sonic's neck profile has a sumptuous feel, with a full yet by no means clubby depth, and a soft-V carve that sits beautifully in the hand. It doesn't hurt that the guitar responds effortlessly to a low setup, and that the frets are immaculately crowned and polished. Add to this an easy-feeling and equally responsive Hipshot vibrato unit, and the Sonic is simply a breeze to play. It might seem obvious, but this guitar's entire being leaves me feeling far more in contact with the wood than I feel with most guitars, even very good ones. What should also be obvious is that Malinoski achieves this at an impressively accessible price.

Thinking any maker diverging so creatively from traditional approaches must have some 'philosophy' at play, I asked Peter to divulge his...

"Philosophy?" he replied. "I find these 'philosophies' to be pompous drivel. I want to make guitars that are beautiful, that play and sound beautifully, that inspire and push the boundaries of the guitar tradition. Truth is, I just like to make things, and guitars give me that fix. They are beautiful objects, they are tools, they are machines, they make beautiful music, they inspire other artists, and I can make them from chunks of wood and metal, and parts and paint in my shop. It's just a lot of fun."

Before plugging in, we must make note of the pickups – a selection from Malinoski's own in-house winds, which are built entirely by him, and entirely by hand. The neck position carries a Type 2 HB, which is "essentially two Fender-like singles to make a humbucker". In the middle is a Type 12 HB, based loosely on a Johnny Smith or mini-humbucker, but with an entirely original design combining one Fender-single-like coil and one coil with adjustable poles attached to a base plate that draws magnetism from both its partner coil and an auxiliary magnet. The bridge position carries his P-42 SC, "very much like a P-90 design, kind of noisy and nasty and likes it hard. It has a low k number [impedance] but it's the hottest pickup of the group... a face melter." Wiring includes a standard five-way switch with master volume and tone controls; a push-pull on the tone splits the middle and neck pickups, giving H/H/S when down and S/S/S when up.

How does it sound? Through a plethora of quality amps, the Sonic surprised the hell out of me with its liveliness, complexity and depth. No mere showpiece, this guitar rolled confidently from spanky yet rich single-coil tones to bluesy grind with superb cut-inducing texture, and snarky and mean high-gain tones that packed more attention-grabbing attitude than anything I've played in a long while. The bridge pickup is predisposed toward the angry, raw, granular side of rock overdrive, yet retains a crispness and detail that renders it something entirely other. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the neck humbucker is capable of extremely rich, round and soothingly dimensional clean jazzy tones – and, yes, the S/S/S settings give an impressive range of Strat-like funk and sting.

All in all, I found the Malinoski Sonic a real puzzler: an artful guitar (if not art-guitar per se), which looks as if it couldn't do much other than sit there looking pretty, yet will range from singing sweetly to ripping faces off with style and aplomb, at the slightest provocation either way. It's a joy to experience and a laudable achievement.

READER BOARDS

As the guitarist in Electric Soup, **NICK BRYLKA-MEE** has been steadily assembling his perfect board. He talks us through the process

KIT LIST

Nick Brylka-Mee

- **PEDALS** EHX Doctor Q, BBE Green Screamer OD, Carl Martin PlexiTone, TC Electronic Spark Booster, EHX Neo Clone chorus, MXR Micro Flanger, TC Electronic PolyTune, Tone City Tape Machine
- **PATCH CABLES** Generic pancake cables and T-Rex leads
- **POWER SUPPLY** T-Rex Fuel Tank
- **BOARD TYPE** Behringer PB600

What inspired this setup?

"I play in Electric Soup, a covers band made up of hospital staff. What started as a one-off gig in 2008 has led to us gigging roughly once a month. We're never going to change the face of rock, but we have a good time! As we expanded our repertoire, I felt a need to add a pedal-oriented dimension to my sound, despite some mickey-taking from my (still in the dark ages) bandmates!"

Tell us a little about the journey...

"Apart from a Big Muff bought in the early 80s, I had very little idea about what I needed, so I embarked on a process of trial and error, selling pedals that didn't fit the bill and reading all the reviews. My best purchases have been my Behringer pedalboard and a Carl Martin PlexiTone. The board is tough and great for gigging – off with the lid and you're good to go! The PlexiTone is always running; it's easy to dial in and it's the bedrock of my sound."

Is there another pedal that you're looking to add?

"I used to own a Bad Cat Classic Cat amp, and the reverb was just lush; I would love to find a pedal to recreate that! I'm also keen on getting into looper pedals, and the EHX Nano Looper 360 seems like good value and simple to use."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?

"I originally used a late-80s Marshall JCM800 combo, a lovely amp which took pedals well, but it was just too damn heavy! After reading some great reviews, I bought a Matrix VB800 head; based on the JCM800, it has been a joy to gig with. I run my board from the front of my amp and it's ultra-reliable. I use two Blackstar 4x8 cabs with it and have all the power I will ever need. Guitar-wise, I have relied heavily on my trusty Strat with a Burstbucker in the bridge, but I tried some Yamaha Revstars at GuitarGuitar in Birmingham recently (great shop), and am now awaiting delivery of the 620 model!"

What lessons have you learned along the way?

"In hindsight, I would have done more research before buying, instead

of randomly purchasing cheap pedals off eBay. Online reviews can be helpful but in an ideal world, I'd find a shop with dozens of pedals laid out to road test!"

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR 'BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, email the details and an image to **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

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TEST PILOTS
PRS S2 CUSTOM 24

G&B recently gave a trio of lucky readers the chance to try out a PRS guitar for a whole year. **PETER COCHRANE** puts the S2 Custom 24 through its paces with his Eagles tribute band, The Illegals...

Peter Cochrane
- **TEST INSTRUMENT** PRS S2 Custom 24
- **BAND** The Illegals
- **MAIN PEDALS & AMPS USED** Music Man HKD-130 head built into a 1x12 combo with Fane Medusa speaker. 80s DigiTech GFX-1 twin-valve guitar processor; 1980s Boss delay
- **SESSIONS SO FAR** Three live performances

Having never played any PRS before, apart from the odd visit to a music store, I was quite excited about the prospect of our first meeting. On first removing the guitar from the generously padded gigbag, my initial impressions were what a good-looking guitar it was. The Whale Blue is a fairly deep shade, and, with the bird inlays, makes it very attractive – beautifully finished.

The range of sounds available with the two coil-tapped humbuckers and three-way switch gives as many variations in tone as I'd require from any instrument. All the frets are neatly rounded and very comfortable to play.

It's difficult to give any new guitar a fair trial when you're used to playing the same guitars (Les Paul and Strat) for the last 25 years, and both guitars feel like wearing your most comfortable pair of old shoes. Any new instrument will naturally need tweaking and playing in.

I've used the new guitar on three live occasions so far, along with my usual instruments. Sound-wise, it's excellent and can produce clean rhythms through to nicely driven lead solos. The locking tuners certainly do their job and tuning was never an issue. On its first outing, I felt that the action was a little high, although I haven't really made any adjustments to date. However, I do feel that in the long run I may have a slight issue with the fingerboard radius, which makes the fretboard more rounded than I'm used to, and, for myself at least, would be less preferable than the flatter 'board of the Les Paul, particularly as the neck is quite narrow.

The layout of the controls appears to be fairly standard for PRS, with an accessible volume control and a tone control with a push-pull coil tap (I'd be interested to know why makers don't just fit push-push switches as standard, as they appear to be much easier to use in a live setting).

The vibrato worked well and the guitar stayed perfectly in tune, although I have used it very sparingly. However, my main gripe with the guitar was with the position of the vibrato arm. When not in use, it constantly got in the way of all the other controls, particularly the three-way selector switch. No matter what position it was in, it was getting in the way of either the volume control, selector switch or, if I tried to put it back, it got in the way of the tone control – unlike a Strat, where you can flick the arm back and all the controls are in front of it and fully accessible. If I was using the Custom 24 on a regular basis, I think the vibrato arm might stay in the bag, which would be a bit of a waste.

I've used the Custom 24 three times live – the guitar is excellent and can produce clean rhythms to nicely driven lead solos

For stage use, I was delighted with the weight of the guitar (I think it's about 7.5lbs). Beautifully balanced, it sat perfectly, and there was no noticeable neck dive. Having unstrapped the Les Paul beforehand, the PRS felt almost featherweight and the body shape makes it extremely comfortable.

I intend to use the guitar much more in the next year, thanks to *G&B*, and I'm sure that with more use it'll become more familiar and find its place in our set.

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STONE DEAF
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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Michael Schenker

Flying V-toting German guitar hero selects some choice cuts from his record collection

German guitar hero Michael Schenker began gigging at the age of 11, playing in classic-rock band Scorpions before joining UFO as lead guitarist. He formed the Michael Schenker Group in 1978 and auditioned for lead guitar roles in The Rolling Stones and Aerosmith in the 70s. His latest release – *On A Mission – Live In Madrid* by Michael Schenker's Temple Of Rock – is out now on double CD, DVD, Blu-ray and Limited Deluxe Edition. For further information, visit www.michaelschenkerhimself.com

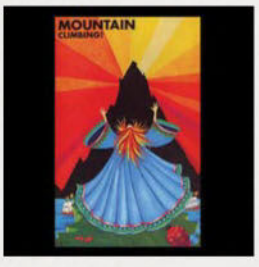
Led Zeppelin
LED ZEPPELIN

"All four of their first albums are full of fantastic songs and fantastic playing. They're still a great joy to listen to. John Bonham's my favourite drummer and musician. The vocals and guitar are amazing, and so is the bass. I love the energy, the expression, the feel. You name it, all four albums have it. They have it all for me. I particularly love *Good Times Bad Times*. Great energy."

Black Sabbath
BLACK SABBATH

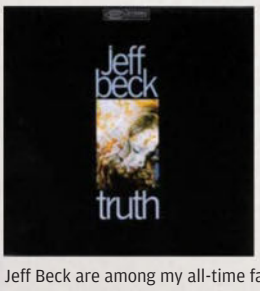
"I like the first album and *Paranoid*. I love the sound of the guitar, the heaviness of all the instruments, the atmosphere and the melodies of the vocals. Very unique. Black Sabbath were on the German version of *Top Of The Pops*, it was completely off the wall. I was very inspired by the guitar sound and it was the beginning of me taking my music to the next level."

Mountain
CLIMBING!



"This album is full of fantastic guitar playing, especially on the track *Theme For An Imaginary Western*. I love the bass and the vocals of Felix Pappalardi, too. The whole thing is a great pleasure to listen to. Leslie West has so much feel and an incredible sense of melody in this song, which features one of my favourite breaks of all time."

Jeff Beck
TRUTH



"The album *Truth* is just absolutely amazing – for both the guitar and the vocals. On, I think it's *Rock My Plimsoul*, I absolutely love the back and forth that happens between the guitar and vocals. Both Rod Stewart and Jeff Beck are among my all-time favourites. I wish that they would play together just one more time. I would definitely be there..."

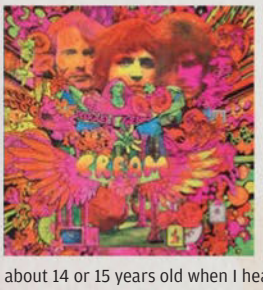
Taste
ON THE BOARDS

"I loved Rory Gallagher. His great raw, melodic blues guitar playing was really enjoyable to listen to. His playing on this, Taste's second album, is just incredible – it's the most amazing raw, melodic and bluesy guitar work you could ever wish to hear. I even love Rory's vocals, too, and Taste were just a brilliant three-piece."

Johnny Winter
AND

"This was Johnny Winter's fourth album and it's probably my favourite of all the things he did. It's full of great raw blues guitar playing. Don't take my word for it, though, just let the incredible music do the talking. Put it on nice and loud, sit back and listen and you'll find out for yourself. I loved Johnny Winter's guitar playing back in those days."

Cream
DISRAELI GEARS



"All Cream's albums were great – they had a fantastic style with great bass and guitar, and of course great drums, too. This album is full of brilliant songs and excellent vocals. Cream were a tremendous three-piece. I was maybe about 14 or 15 years old when I heard them for the first time – Eric Clapton was a very fluid blues guitarist with lots of melody in those days."

Deep Purple
DEEP PURPLE IN ROCK

"Metal music, I love it. Deep Purple had great guitar, vocals, drums, bass, keyboards, energy... and, of course, great songs. It was just fun to listen to. I bought this album with a friend because we heard that the singer had this incredible high voice. That's how I discovered Deep Purple. Then, of course, I discovered the rest of the band and they all were great, too..."

Van Halen
VAN HALEN

"What can you say about Van Halen? Just amazing. This album is one of those rare records that I'll never be able to over-hear. It was a whole new way of guitar playing that was very rhythmic and melodic. There's a wonderful chemistry between the vocals and the guitar playing, and there are so many fantastic songs on the album... just pure fun."

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Summer NAMM 16®

In late June, *G&B* swapped a rain-soaked, Brexit-obsessed UK for the Nashville sunshine and a shedload of cool new guitar gear. Read on for the highlights...

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Joe Supple**

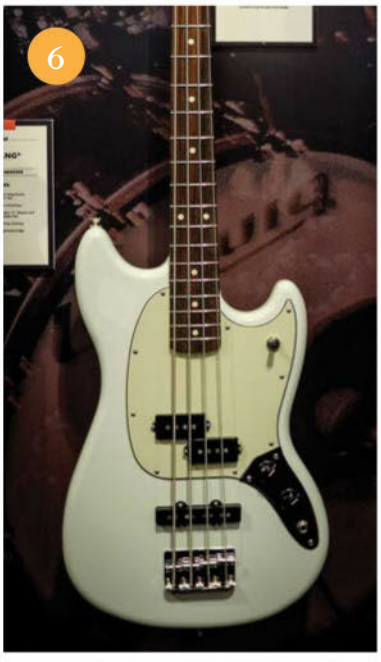
The supremely high standard of musicianship displayed by the countless bands passing the hat around in the bars on Nashville's Broadway proves it's tough to get to the top in Music City. It was actually rather tough to get to Nashville at all for Team *G&B* as a somewhat congested passport control area at Atlanta's Hartsfield–Jackson airport meant that your intrepid reporters missed their connecting flight to Guitar Town.

When we eventually landed in Nashville – 15 minutes before we left Atlanta, due to crossing a timezone rather than time travel – it wasn't long before we decided that Winter NAMM's little brother might just be our favourite show of all. With a more intimate feel, there's more time to stop and talk to the brains behind the gear, and many more opportunities to pick up and play it. Across the following pages we'll guide you through our pick of the new guitars, basses, amps and effects on display at Nashville's Music City Center.

Fender's Custom Shop had obviously been very busy in preparation for this year's show, and it introduced a mid-year collection featuring six new limited edition models plus a Pete Townshend signature Stratocaster and the '80 Proof' Blues Junior 1 .

A cool $2,000 and just 100 in number, the '80 Proof' Blues Junior Limited Edition is encased in a cabinet lovingly handcrafted from reclaimed bourbon barrels bearing distinct stamps and markings from the various source distilleries.

Our favourite models amongst the Custom Shop's limited edition electrics were the H/S Tele Heavy Relic in Candy Apple Red over Pink Paisley and Lake Placid Blue over Blue Flower 2 . Features include '63 C neck profiles, round-lam 'boards, EVH neck humbuckers and handwound Twisted Tele bridge units. The Heavy Relic El Diablo Strat (available in Two-Colour Sunburst 3 , '55



Desert Tan 4 and Cimarron Red) was another looker with its raw aluminium scratchplate.

Outside of the Custom Shop, as well as the updated, Mexican-made Deluxe Series from which we reviewed the HSS Strat last month, Fender also unveiled a new range of Offsets that will be available later this year. The line comprises a Duo-Sonic, Duo-Sonic HS 5, Mustang, Mustang 90 and a Mustang Bass 6. Short-scale instruments with cool features in sexy colours – we like these a lot!

Another highlight of the Fender stand – though it was subject to the kind of embargo more readily reserved for the launch of a new iPhone – was the Flea Signature Jazz Bass 7. The Red Hot Chili Peppers four-string supremo's signature bass features a Road Worn nitrocellulose Shell Pink finish, dual Pure Vintage Jazz Bass single-coil pickups, a U-shaped maple neck with a Road Worn urethane finish and an engraved neck plate with artwork by Flea himself.

Fender's Custom Shop had been busy, and it introduced a mid-year collection featuring six limited edition models

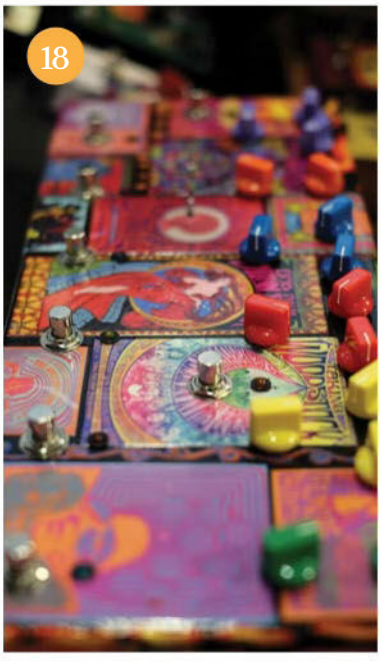
The day before Summer NAMM, we headed over to Epiphone HQ in East Nashville, where Scott Harrison 8, in-house R&D luthier, talked us through the company's new Masterbilt Century range of electro-acoustic archtops. Inspired by legendary Epiphone models of the 1930s and designed to be played and amplified as true acoustic instruments, the line comprises the 17-inch De Luxe Classic and De Luxe 9, 16-inch Zenith and Zenith Classic 10 and 14.5-inch Olympic and Olympic Classic. Common features include solid spruce tops with longitudinal bracing, replica 30s >

tuners upgraded to an 18:1 ratio, NanoFlex HD pickups and eSonic HD preamps. We'll have a full, in-depth review in next month's issue.

In the world of acoustics, we were wowed by the Martin D-1 Authentic 1931 slot-headstock, 12-fret model

The ever-affable Taylor Guitars master luthier Andy Powers 11 talked and played us through the company's new models, including the gorgeous 712e 12-Fret in Western Sunburst 12 and the new 800 Deluxe series with an elegant radius armrest. Also in the world of acoustics, we were wowed by the Martin D-1 Authentic 1931 slot-headstock 12-fret model 13, which replicates closely the first ever Martin-branded dreadnought, that evolved from instruments the company built for Ditson. Features include a solid Adirondack spruce top 14 seasoned using the company's Vintage Tone System process, solid mahogany back and sides and an authentic '31 neck profile. It's a beautiful machine, and while we're on the subject of aesthetically pleasing instruments, D'Angelico debuted its bling-tastic Deluxe models at the show 15 & 16 (expect a review in the autumn), and also launched Electrozinc strings based on the first modern round-wound electric string created by John D'Angelico and John D'Addario in the late 1930s and out of production since the sixties.

Legendary effects guru Bill Finnegan was present in person at the show (no, it wasn't a clone), and he talked us through his new prototype pedal design 17. One of the most popular ways to run his Klon Centaur or KTR is as a clean boost with the gain control rolled all the way off – his new circuit dispenses



with the dual-gang gain pot entirely and occupies far less pedalboard space as a result. The release date is TBC and Bill has yet to finalise the graphics, but expect the buzz around this to be big...

Jaw-droppingly cool pedals alert! Summer NAMM has traditionally been popular with boutique effects manufacturers, and perhaps the most visually daring offerings were to be found from the JAM Pedals Custom Shop 18. We also got to hear a pair of very cool-sounding new units from Seymour Duncan, in the shape of the Forza Overdrive 19 and Killing Floor High Gain Boost 20. The former is an expressive, versatile overdrive, while the latter offers a monstrous, highly musical boost. Expect a review in *G&B* very soon.

Back in electric guitar land, Guild's S-200 T-Bird reissue – previewed earlier this year at Musikmesse – was joined by a modern, lightweight Bluesbird reissue 21 with a chambered body, available in Jet Black and the flamey Iced Tea Burst pictured here. With street prices expected to be under a grand, this could be a real contender for gigging guitarists looking for an affordable LP alternative.

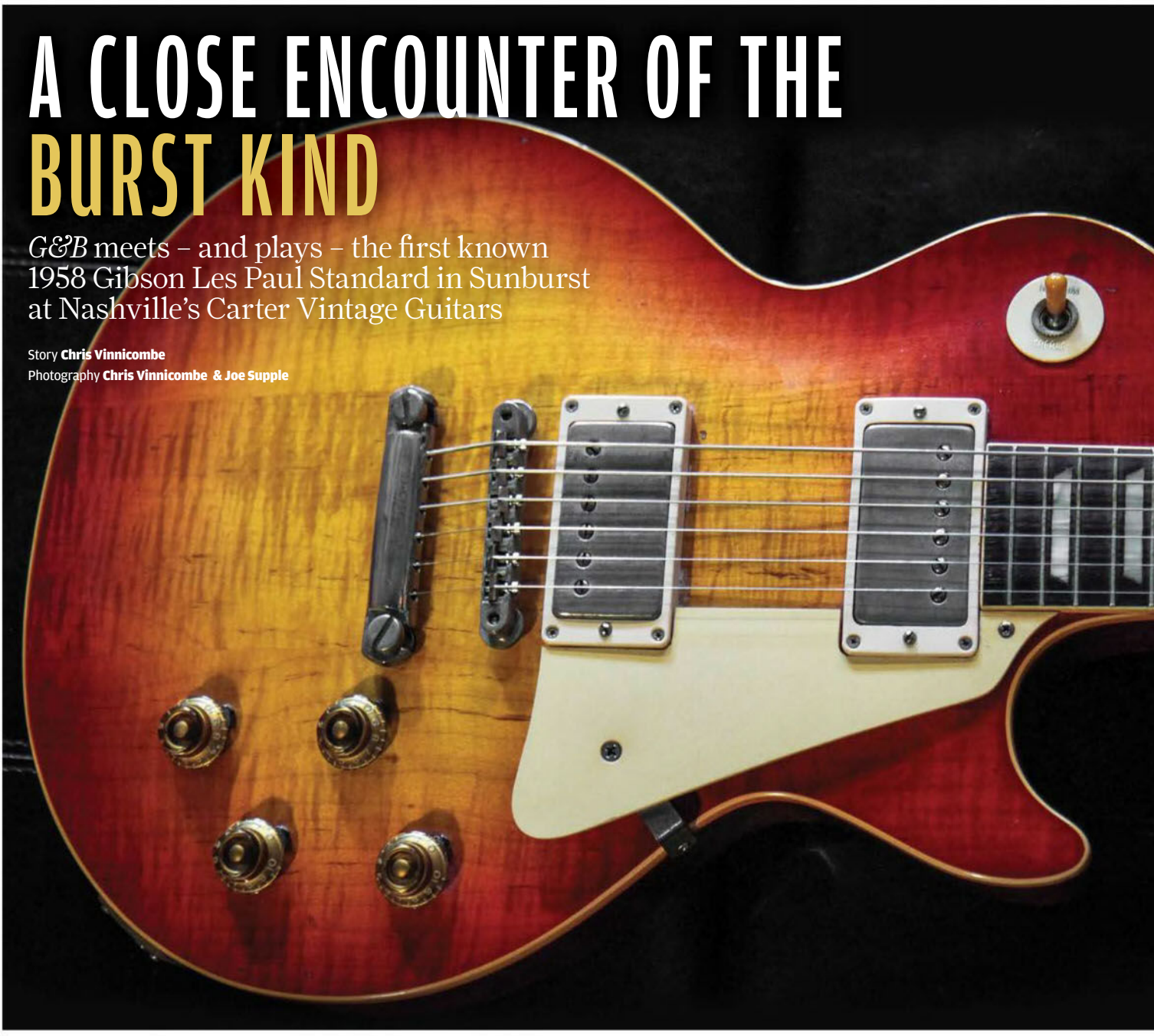
Readers of a certain vintage will be pleased to find out that Fryette Amplification has resurrected the much-loved British amp brand Sound City 22. On display were the Master 100 and Master Lead 50 heads based on Dave Reeves' original designs with a handful of modern tweaks. The cabinets come loaded with custom Fane Acoustics drivers, and the company has even replicated the original 'Sound City Power' speaker labels.

Finally, eagle-eyed attendees at the show may have noticed Greg Koch playing a couple of prototype T-style models 23 that represent the fruits of a collaboration between Koch, Fret-King design supremo Trev Wilkinson and Fishman. Stay tuned for plenty more where these came from...

A CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE BURST KIND

G&B meets – and plays – the first known 1958 Gibson Les Paul Standard in Sunburst at Nashville's Carter Vintage Guitars

Story **Chris Vinnicombe**
Photography **Chris Vinnicombe & Joe Supple**



With Summer NAMM 2016 just hours away, we could think of no better way to kill time in Music City than to have an audience with one of the most significant electric guitars on the planet. Readers of our February 2016 issue will know that Carter Vintage Guitars is no stranger to vintage and rare instruments, but this might just top them all: what is believed to be the very first Sunburst-finish Les Paul Standard ever to leave the Gibson factory.

Zach Broyles from Carter Vintage takes up the narrative: "We got an email from a friend or maybe a family member of the owner who was reaching out to say that they had a Gibson for sale. In the email, they mentioned the serial number and Walter [Carter] – who was Gibson's house historian for years – recognised it, and he recalled seeing the serial number in Gibson's shipping ledgers.

> "A single owner got it when he was 14, for Christmas. He played it throughout high school and put it under the bed"

"And sure enough, it's the same guitar, shipped May 28 1958, same day as Slash's, which is nine serial numbers after this and everyone thought was the earliest. So it was a single owner – he got it when he was 14, for Christmas. He played it throughout high school and he put it under the bed."

Like many Goldtops, serial number 8 3087 has a three-piece top rather than the two that Gibson later settled on for its iconic Bursts.

Other interesting points to note are that the condition is remarkable; it has hardly any lacquer checking and around the back, there's very little wear, with the neck displaying only a little fading – to a more pinkish hue than the factory red.

What does this $625,000 instrument play like? The neck profile isn't as deep as modern '58 reissues, but it's very comfortable. Acoustically, it's bright, with a taut, snappy feel. The slim frets offer a little more fight when bending strings than

Above: What a Christmas present... The 1958 Burst pictured with its One Careful Owner

Below: Walter Carter of Carter Vintage recognised the Les Paul's serial number from Gibson's shipping ledgers

you'd get from a Les Paul fitted with jumbo fretwire. Quite apart from the huge historical significance, it's a guitar that's hard not to love.

"This was going to be the guitar that they would take around to shops and show them what the new finish was going to look like," Broyles explains. "It was just going to be a showcase instrument. In the shipping ledger, it doesn't say 'cherry sunburst' or 'sunburst', it says 'special finish'. So it was still in the testing phase. But it ended up getting sold.

"The poker chip got lost and he broke the jack plate, so his dad made him a replacement. The tuners had shrunk, so we put some repros on that fit perfectly. He'd replaced one of them 'a few years ago' back in 1963. But the pickups are great, they are beautifully balanced..."

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A dapper Scotty Moore with his Gibson Super 400 CES hollowbody in 1958

Scotty Moore

1931 - 2016

Elvis's right-hand man was a truly inspirational guitarist whose exciting style changed music forever. Here, *G&B* celebrates the life of a true six-string legend, with advice on recreating his timeless tone

Story **Michael Stephens**

When Scotty Moore released his first solo album in 1964, he called it *The Guitar That Changed The World*. For a man well known for his modesty, gentle humour and measured approach to life, it could have seemed like conceit. But, in this instance, Moore's statement was more than justified. As Elvis Presley's most trusted guitar player, band leader, even his first manager, Moore was the twanging hurricane at the heart of rock 'n' roll's first storm. His guitar really did change the world.

Moore died aged 84 in his hometown of Nashville in late June after a long illness, and his passing marked the end of a legend. He was the last survivor of Elvis's original band, which included Presley, bassist Bill Black and, arguably, producer Sam Phillips. Elvis was the focal point for a much bigger picture, and Winfield Scott 'Scotty' Moore III loomed large in the frame. Compared to Elvis, Moore was no showman, but to aspiring guitarists the world over, his pioneering rockabilly licks, ad lib'd lead breaks and consummate style were groundbreaking, splashing kaleidoscopic tones over the likes of *That's All Right*, *Heartbreak Hotel*, *Mystery Train*, *Blue Suede Shoes* and *Jailhouse Rock*.

As Keith Richards famously observed: "When I heard *Heartbreak Hotel*, I knew what I wanted to do in life. It was as plain as day. All I wanted to do in the world was to be able to play and sound like that. Everyone else wanted to be Elvis, I wanted to be Scotty."

Country boy to city slicker

Like Elvis, Moore was born in Tennessee. He began playing guitar aged just eight, learning from family and friends. There was no rock 'n' roll, so the country and light jazz songs of the day ruled his ear. The blues – it was still 'negro music' to many, after all – wasn't really part of his vocabulary. Moore recalled that he listened to anyone he could for inspiration, but the rules were dictated by radio.

"Early on, they didn't have that many guitars in the orchestras, and when they played a song on the radio, they wouldn't tell you who the guitar player was," Moore remembered. "The only ones they would directly tell you about were Chet Atkins and Les Paul. I didn't know until after I got out of the navy that there were any other famous guitar players besides Chet and Les... I think there were some others out on the coasts who played in the studios. [Swing guitarist] George Barnes was one, but he wasn't as well known as Chet or Les."

> "It was as plain as day. Everyone else wanted to be Elvis, I wanted to be Scotty"
>
> **KEITH RICHARDS**

While serving in the Korean War with the US Navy (1948 to '52), Moore had taken a guitar with him: a non-cutaway 'jazzbox' à la Barnes and Charlie Christian. But his travels introduced him to new models and, on discharge, he rewarded himself with a more futuristic-looking Fender Tele. He'd bought an early Japanese Fender copy, which he liked for its portability and usefulness to play sitting down. "But I swear, those frets were made out of old beer cans," he laughed. "I came out of the navy in January of '52 and said 'I'm going to buy me a good guitar'. That's the reason I went out and bought a Fender."

Moore had became a member of Memphis six-piece Starlite Wranglers by 1954, a band that also included upright bass-player Bill Black. The Wranglers were strictly country: Stetsons and a pedal steel, y'all. And Chet Atkins was Moore's main inspiration. It was maybe Chet's influence that saw Moore upgrade guitar around this time. He saw a gold Gibson ES-295 on sale at the O.K. Houck Piano Company store in Memphis in 1953, and fell for it immediately. "The streamlined Fender just didn't feel right when I played it," he told *Guitar Player*. "It probably had something to do with its shape. The Gibson was more feminine. I could make out with the Gibson. I couldn't get it on with a Fender."

Although Moore was still working in a dry cleaners by day – Elvis was still at high school – the Wranglers did eventually get a break at Sam Phillips' Sun Studio, backing

Getty Images

Moore with Elvis on the set of *Jailhouse Rock* in Hollywood in 1957

Getty Images

singer Doug Poindexter on early 1954's *My Kind Of Carrying On*. Reaction was lukewarm: *Billboard* magazine judged that "big-city country buyers might not go big for this, but it should do well in the back country". It sold 330 copies in about a year.

But '54 was soon about something else entirely, as Sun already had plans for Moore. Sam Phillips had recorded Presley the year before, singing a song for his mom, and thought he may work well with Moore and Black. Phillips suggested Moore call the then still-on-file boy from Tupelo, though the guitarist was not bowled over by Elvis's audition at his house. Moore's opinion echoed Black's: "The guy sings good. He doesn't knock me out."

Phillips nevertheless suggested a studio try-out with just Elvis, Moore and Black: Sun's motto was "We record anything, anywhere, anytime", after all. The first songs they recorded were "all slow", according to Moore, and a bit underwhelming. Around 9.30pm, ready for bed before the next day's jobs, the trio decided to sign off by "goofing around" on a blues song, sped up.

Moore remembered: "Elvis just started beating the snot out of his guitar – acting the fool and singing – and Bill grabbed his bass and started playing along with him. Sam poked his head out of the door – this was before mixing consoles had a talkback button – and he said, 'What are you guys doing? That sounds pretty good, why don't you keep doing it?'. So I got my guitar, ran through it a couple of times, and that was it. That was the beginning of, how do you say it – all hell breaking loose!" *That's All Right* was the result.

The Blue Moon Boys

The Blue Moon Boys – Elvis, Scotty and Bill – were still very much grounded in hillbilly and country-fied R&B, but things soon came together as something altogether new.

> "I was listening to Atkins, Travis, Kessel, Farlow, BB King. I was just into everybody"
>
> SCOTTY MOORE

Getty Images

Moore with DJ Fontana in Nashville, Tennessee in 1997

The first four Sun singles – *That's All Right/Blue Moon Of Kentucky*, *I Don't Care If The Sun Don't Shine/Good Rockin' Tonight*, *Milkcow Blues Boogie/You're A Heartbreaker*, and *I'm Left, You're Right, She's Gone/Baby Let's Play House* – pretty much defined early rock 'n' roll.

Moore's licks may have been common to both country and blues of the time, but his sharp phrasing and interplay with Presley's vocals was spot on. And as a designated lead guitarist with no vocal duties, he provided a standalone hero figure aspiring six-stringers could latch onto. With DJ Fontana added on drums – "we couldn't hear ourselves!" – and with Elvis on primal rhythm acoustic, the four-piece rock 'n' roll band prototype was all there. "I tried to play around the singer," Moore opined in his 1997 autobiography *That's All Right, Elvis*. "If Elvis was singing a song a certain way, there was no point in me trying to top him on what he just did. The idea was to play something that went the other way – a counterpoint."

"I was just trying to fill in the holes," he told *Guitar Player* of his role. "Those were all the licks I knew, and when the tape started rolling, I knew Sam wanted something in there – something different. I just had to fill in the holes."

Of his solos, which were so influential, he said: "They were primarily my own invention, if you can use the word 'invention'. A lot was a combination of old blues licks, some [Merle] Travis, some Atkins, a combination of thumb

Moore performing at the Austin Music Hall in Texas on 15 March, 1997

Getty Images

and finger – just whatever I could make work, really. I used a thumbpick mostly, then a straightpick on other styles.

"I don't think I really had any particular favourites. I was listening to Atkins, Travis, Barney Kessel, Tal Farlow, BB King. I was just into everybody. As long as he played guitar, he was fine with me."

The Blue Moon Boys' early shows were where the singer earned notoriety. Before long, it was just an 'Elvis Presley' show. But Moore was more than just the guitar player. He was *de facto* band leader, and manager of the whole phenomena. He was sensible enough to know what people had really come to see. Elvis's hip-swivelling, tiptoeing moves were a sensation from their first Memphis show, opening for

SCOTTY'S SIX STRINGS

Moore's first proper six string was a 1930s Gibson-made Kalamazoo-brand acoustic and, his brief flirtation with Fender aside (a '52 Telecaster), he remained mostly faithful to Gibson.

With very early Elvis, he grabbed his 1952 gold Gibson ES-295 (bought in '53), which he modified with a Melita Synchro-Sonic with adjustable saddles that allowed him to intonate each string. This meant a new trapeze tailpiece, too; he chose a Kluson, as used on Gibson's ES-125. "I dearly love the hollowbody sound," Moore recalled. "To me, that's the sound of jazz – and rock 'n' roll. To me, a hollowbody is the sound of wood making music. A solidbody is the sound of an amp... That ES-295 enhanced Elvis's voice better than anything else I could have used." Its mods are faithfully recreated on the still-made Gibson ES-295 Scotty Moore.

By 1955, he traded up to a Gibson L5-CESN. Moore used that guitar – along with the new custom EchoSonic amp he bought in May 1955 – to record the last Sun single *Mystery Train/I Forgot To Remember To Forget* and for most of Elvis's RCA label years.

In '57, Scotty traded up again for a Gibson Super 400 CESN. With a body width of 18 inches, the Super 400 CES remains the largest guitar Gibson has ever made. He used his blonde/natural Super 400 CES on *Jailhouse Rock*, *King Creole* and the King's first post-army sessions, and was still using it when he accompanied Elvis on stage in Hawaii in '61. For his own solo album T*he Guitar That Changed The World*, Moore had obtained the sharp (Florentine) cutaway sunburst Super 400 CES as seen in Elvis' '68 NBC 'Comeback Special' TV show. On that show, Moore also plays Elvis's Gibson J-200.

For his own latter-day comeback, Moore picked on a Chet Atkins Gibson prototype (and production models) plus a Gibson ES-335, other L-5s and a Gibson Tal Farlow.

Getty Images

Elvis and Moore rehearsing for their appearance on the Milton Berle Show at NBC's Burbank Studios in LA in June 1956

Moore (back row, third from left) with his band

Slim Whitman. As the girls screamed, Moore and Black simply encouraged Elvis to crank up the sexuality. Moore joked: "We were the only band that was directed by an ass!"

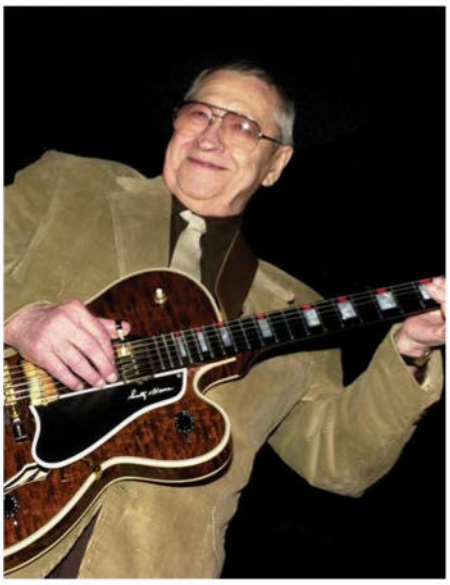
Moore remained down to earth amid the mayhem – he claimed he never broke a string. On the road, he carried out maintenance on his EchoSonic amp himself. And even though the shows were accidentally inventing the 'rock show' Moore and the Boys adopted no airs and graces. "I was with Keith Richards in the studio, and he asked me how many guitars I used to take on the road. I told him one. I had to carry a guitar in my left hand and an amp in my right hand – in and out of every show we played! He got a big kick out of that."

Outside forces

Presley's stellar rise was, in many ways, unkind to Moore. The original deal was 50 per cent for Elvis and 25 each for Moore and Black on live revenue – plus a proposed 0.25 per cent of all recording sales – which would have made all of them millionaires. But Moore soon found himself on a salary of $250 a week. "It was a good salary," he noted, but knew it was nothing compared to the income generated. "Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose," was Moore's sanguine reflection much later. "I guess there are some things that should be put in writing."

Elvis's call-up to the US Army saw even Moore's salary ended, and the unscrupulous management of 'Colonel' Tom Parker saw Moore sidelined altogether. He did appear in a few post-Army Elvis movies, but Moore wasn't cut out for acting. He admitted the music took a back seat in the Elvis "machine". "Elvis gave up as far as the music they wanted him to do [for movies] was concerned," said Moore. "There might be one song in each picture that he really liked, but he hated all of it. Mostly, he'd say, 'Come on, guys. Let's do this piece of shit and get it over with'."

> "Tone is the thing. Scotty Moore once told me 'get some better tone and you're there'"
>
> JEFF BECK



Elvis's 60s shows saw others – notably James Burton – take his place, but Moore remained seemingly happy. He didn't fancy long US tours or residencies anyway: "It's like starting over". But Moore was onboard for NBC TV's '68 Comeback Special. He was still the King's right-hand man, just like back in the day. Elvis's favourite guitars were Gibsons, too. But Parker, manager from 1956, wouldn't do deals with Gibson for Elvis, as other makers simply offered more money. On the Comeback Special, Elvis played Scotty's Gibson Super 400; and Scotty played Elvis's blonde Gibson J-200. Even when Elvis got his Gibson J-200 with 'Elvis Presley' inlayed on the neck, it was invoiced by Gibson to Scotty Moore, not Elvis Presley.

Post Comeback Special, the King still wanted Moore and Black back. Elvis wanted to tour Europe, but the Colonel's illegal immigrant status meant he couldn't leave the USA. A Vegas residency was offered, but Parker's sums were derisory. "The money they were offering for a week was like one day's work for a session. It was strictly economic," recalled Moore. "We had to turn it down, and that's what made me hang it [the guitar] up."

Moore concentrated on studio work. In the 50s, he'd already produced a hit single, *Tragedy*, for Thomas Wayne Perkins, brother of Johnny Cash guitarist Luther Perkins, and became production manager at Sam Phillips Recording Service – as well as starting Music City Recorders in Nashville and launching Belle Meade Records. Album and TV production/engineering/session

credits abounded – Ringo Starr, Dolly Parton, Bob Hope, Perry Como, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins and more – but an ill-fated tape duplication business in the 70s saw Moore go bankrupt. Astonishingly, Moore reportedly earned only a little over $30,000 from his partnership with Elvis Presley.

The King's man

After years in the background, Moore returned to playing live in the 90s on Elvis revival shows and, notably, the 1997 album with DJ Fontana, *All The King's Men*. Guests paying homage included Bill Black's Combo, Keith Richards, Ron Wood, Jeff Beck, Levon Helm and Steve Earle. He and DJ Fontana backed Paul McCartney for the ex-Beatle's cover of *That's All Right*. Moore also cut an album with Ten Years After's Alvin Lee.

With Moore back in the spotlight, the music world rolled out the honours: The Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame, Guitar Center's Rockwalk in Hollywood and Nashville, the Orville H Gibson Lifetime Achievement Award, his own signature Gibson ES-295 model, membership of the Memphis Music Hall Of Fame...

Moore accepted all the plaudits with his usual low-key grace, but it has always been up to others to summarise his unique standing in guitar history. "Tone is the thing," Jeff Beck noted. "That's something that came from Scotty Moore, who once told me: 'Get some better tone and you're there'."

Keith Richards, in his autobiography *Life*, skipped any such technicalities. Richards' simple words echoed those of many: "Scotty Moore was my icon."

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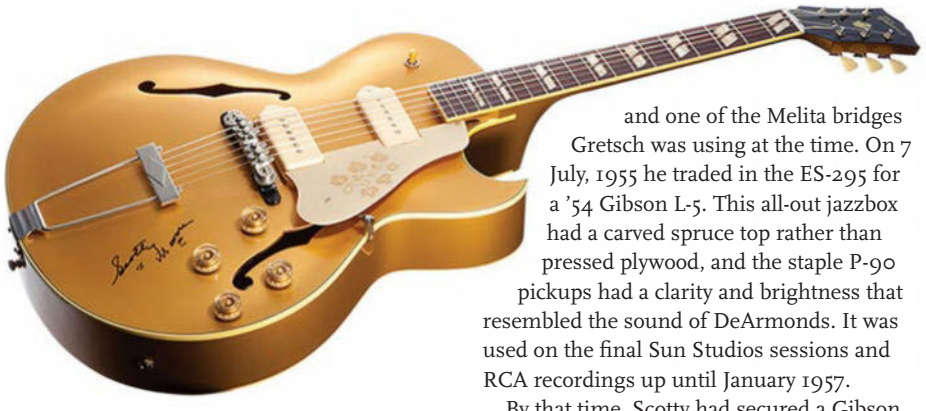
SOUND LIKE SCOTTY

Story **Huw Price**

EVERY YEAR, THE NUMBER of people who heard Scotty Moore play live in his heyday gets fewer, so all we really have to go on is his studio sound, together with the well-documented accounts of the equipment he used. So, let's break things down and see if we can crack the formula for Scotty's Elvis-era guitar sound...



Guitars

Scotty Moore is one of those guitar players who will forever be associated with a particular guitar model that he only used for a very brief period. It just so happens that the period in question changed music forever – and his guitar was a Gibson ES-295.

Having traded in his '52 Telecaster for the ES-295, Scotty remained a loyal Gibson man throughout his life. The ES-295 was basically a gold-finished ES-175 with cream-covered P-90 pickups. Scotty fitted a trapeze tailpiece and one of the Melita bridges Gretsch was using at the time. On 7 July, 1955 he traded in the ES-295 for a '54 Gibson L-5. This all-out jazzbox had a carved spruce top rather than pressed plywood, and the staple P-90 pickups had a clarity and brightness that resembled the sound of DeArmonds. It was used on the final Sun Studios sessions and RCA recordings up until January 1957.

By that time, Scotty had secured a Gibson endorsement and he was sent a '56 Super 400, also with staple P-90s. This was the guitar he used for the rest of his time with Elvis, but you can also hear it being played by Reggie Young on *Suspicious Minds* and *Kentucky Rain*.

Inevitably, '50s Gibson jazzboxes are priced beyond many of us. But Gibson did produce an ES-295 reissue as well as a Custom Shop Scotty Moore edition. You can also find Epiphone ES-295s at more affordable prices. Any deep, fully hollow-bodied archtop with P-90 pickups should provide a strong flavour of early Scotty tone. Staple P-90s are not widely available, but can be ordered from the Seymour Duncan Custom Shop.

The effects

Sam Phillips used an Ampex tape machine to create a short delay effect known as slapback echo – and it became a signature of Scotty's studio and live sound. Many feel that Echoplex tape-echo machines sound similar to Ray Butts' design, but you could get very close with valve and solid-state WEM Copycats, Binsons or even a Roland Space Echo.

Although nothing quite beats the sound of real tape echo, there are plenty of convincing and convenient stompbox options for slapback. Check out the Carl Martin Red Repeat and the MXR Carbon Copy. Paul Pigat swears by the Boss DM-2 and Danelectro echo pedals can be cheap but very cheerful indeed.

Modelling pedals such as the Catalinbread Belle Epoch will take you as close to tape echo as a stompbox can get. In the studio, you can get fantastic results using plug-in effects – and there are some extremely convincing models based on specific tape recorders. Whatever you're using, set it for a fast repeat around 120 milliseconds, with only one or two repeats.

Microphones

Every guitar player has, at some point, obsessed over a favourite guitar sound and tried to recreate it. Most of us will research the rig and maybe upgrade our gear with pickups, vintage-style speakers or even exotic amplifier components. The crucial link in the signal chain that everybody seems to overlook is the microphone used to record the guitar.

Sound engineers can get as obsessed over microphones as we can over guitars and amps. Microphones tend to have very strong sonic signatures, which impose themselves all over your precious guitar tone. So it makes sense here to consider the types of microphones that would have been used.

According to Jim Dickinson, all of the great recordings at Sun were made with a handful of microphones – an RCA 77-DX, Shure 55, RCA 44-BX and an Altec Lansing 'Coke bottle' condenser. Although the Shure 55 is known as the 'Elvis mic', all the Sun Studios photos show him using the RCA 77-DX. It's unlikely the delicate Altec would have been used on a loud guitar amp, so Scotty's amp was probably mic'd with the Shure 55 or the RCA 44-BX. My best guess would be the RCA, with the Shure on Bill Black's double bass.

Ribbons are clear and natural-sounding microphones with a full, fat tone, rolled-off treble response and soft transient response. The 44-BX was a figure-eight ribbon microphone, so it picked up front and rear. Back then, microphones weren't jammed up against the speaker cloth, so setting them further back ensures there's a lot of room ambience mixed with the direct amp sound. The microphone signal would have gone through a valve microphone preamp and everything was recorded onto tape.

Since Elvis and the boys recorded live together in the room at both Sun and RCA, there was a lot of spillage. When you mix sessions like that, you have to work with the spillage to achieve a balanced mix. If you try this in the modern style – starting with the drums and bass, then adding the instruments until you get to the vocal – everything goes wrong as soon as you push up the vocal fader.

Instead, you need to start with the vocal leading and augment the spilled sound by fading the other instruments up into the mix.

For Scotty's sound, that means a lot of what you're hearing is the guitar spilling through Elvis' vocal microphone.

If you're obsessive, you can buy a vintage RCA 44-BX microphone or a spot-on replica from AEA. Most decent ribbon mics will get you in the ballpark: Thomann sells sub-£100 ribbon mics under the T-Bone brand. Avoid EQ and compression when you're recording and if you're not using tape, try applying a tape-simulator plug-in instead, such as the particularly effective Universal Audio Ampex plug-in.

The Amps

Scotty used two different amps during his tenure as Elvis' guitar guy. The first was purchased in 1952 and pictures show it was a wide-panel tweed Deluxe. The serial number (0958) suggests it was a 5C3 model from '52.

The solid pine cabinet had a 12-inch Jensen P12R alnico speaker, 6SC7 preamp tubes, two 6V6 power tubes and a 5Y3GT rectifier. Those octal preamp tubes have lower gain than 12AX7s and their naturally smooth and fulsome midrange combines nicely with the cathode-biased 6V6s.

Scotty used it live and in the studio, with the Starlite Wranglers and with Elvis on the early Sun recordings. It was traded in to put $65 towards a Ray Butts EchoSonic at the O.K. Houck Piano Co. in Memphis on 24 May, 1955. So that means the Deluxe was used on every Sun session besides the ones in July and November 1955. The songs *I Forgot To Remember To Forget*, *Mystery Train*' and *When It Rains, It Really Pours* were recorded with the EchoSonic.

Chet Atkins was a huge influence on Scotty so he discovered that Chet had started using an EchoSonic amplifier made by Butts up in Cairo, Illinois. These were hand-made amps featuring a built-in tape-echo effect that would have allowed Scotty to recreate Sam Phillips' studio effects in a live setting.

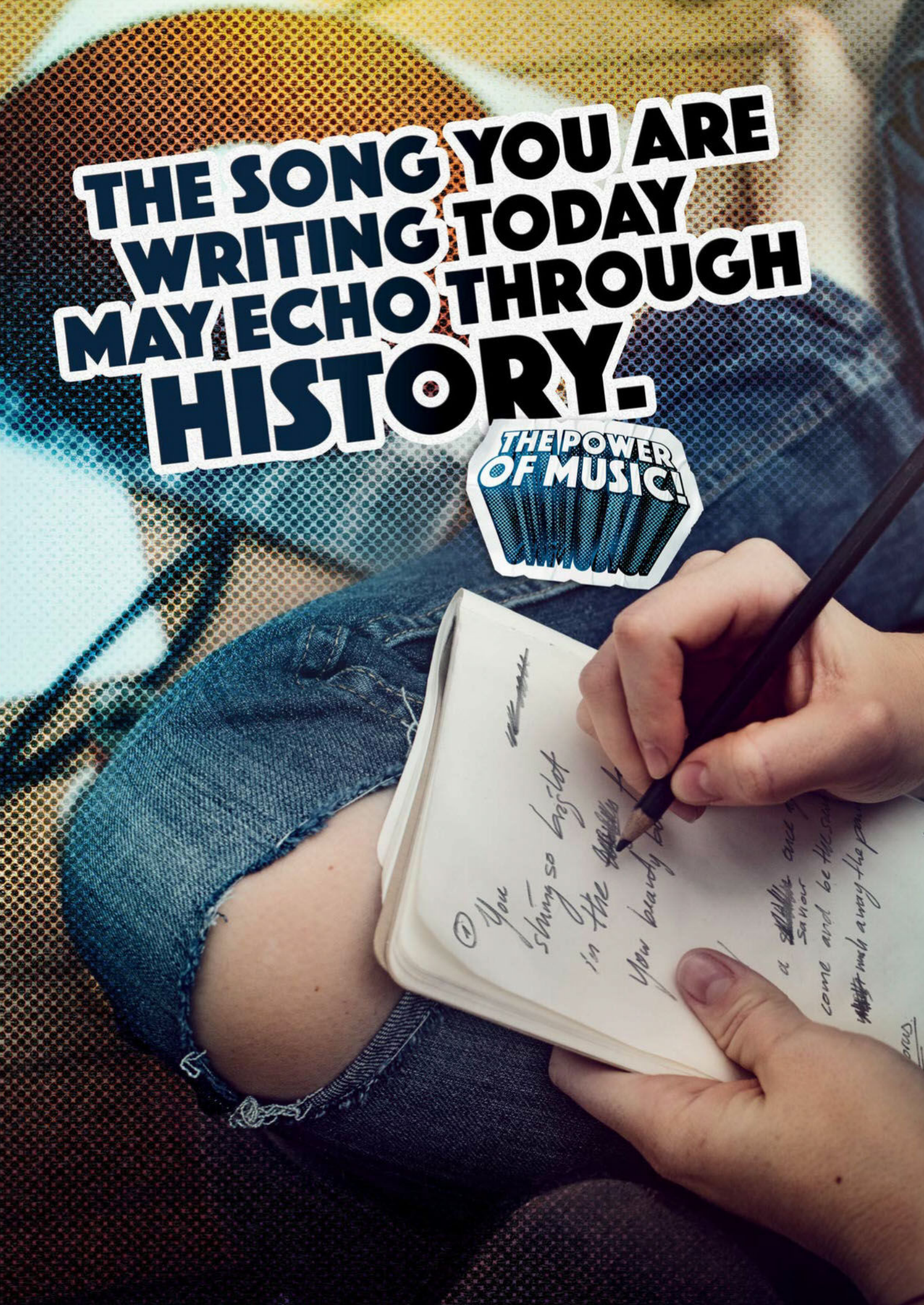
The price was a then-astronomic $495, which equated to two tweed Twins, plus change. Scotty used this amp exclusively with Elvis from May 1955 up to and including the '68 Comeback Special performance.

Butts made around 68 EchoSonics and they are now understandably very scarce and valuable. Eventually, Butts licensed Rickenbacker to manufacture a production version called the Ek-O-Sound, for which circuit diagrams are available. They show a pair of cathode-biased 6L6 power valves that produced about 25 watts. As Elvis shows became bigger, Scotty augmented his stage sound with powered 50-watt satellite cabinets, each containing four eight-inch JBL speakers.

The consensus among knowledgeable Scotty fans is that the speaker in his EchoSonic played a big part in Scotty's tone. The EchoSonic EA-1 had a 12-inch University Model UC-121 Series 100, with a black basket and silver magnet. Given the mid-50s manufacturing date, it's safe to assume it had an alnico magnet.

An earlier TV-front Deluxe will sound much the same as Scotty's 5C3; but the later 5D3 and 5E3 Deluxe models have a brighter and fiercer tone, with more gain. Although easy to find, prices for the early 50s Deluxes have been climbing steadily. Alternatively, you could have a 5C3 clone made. The Rift Tweed 15c (£999) comes with NOS 6SC7s and is hand-built here in the UK.

Tracking down a Rickenbacker Ek-O-Sound would be easier than finding an EchoSonic, but not much. Instead, consider a cathode-biased 6L6 amp like the Lazy J 20 or Supro Royal Reverb. Alternatively, ask a custom-amp builder to make a replica for you – minus the built-in tape echo, it should be a reasonably straightforward build. Finally, set the amp so it breaks up slightly when you dig in hard and keep the treble low-ish, because Scotty used a full, deep tone without too much top end.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MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

Mr Johns

Since his early childhood, Ethan Johns has been surrounded by some of the music world's brightest lights. He's gone on to become a highly regarded producer, working with the likes of Tom Jones, Ryan Adams and Paul McCartney. His guitar collection isn't bad, either...

Story **Bob Hewitt** | Photography **Bob Hewitt, George Cheatle & Jennifer Johns**

When people talk about 'a lifetime in music', few can envisage what it must be like to be surrounded – from a very early age – by the creation of some of the most memorable rock albums of all time.

Three-year-old Ethan Johns was not only aware of what was going on around him, he was absorbing it almost by osmosis, thanks to his record-producing father, the legendary Glyn Johns, and a host of rock 'n' roll luminaries recording at his dad's studio. The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, The Eagles, Eric Clapton, The Who – the list goes on and on...

Awareness turned to hands-on interest, and Ethan learned all he could about the record-making business – as well as becoming a top-flight multi-instrumentalist and songwriter along the way. There was no easy ride; Ethan came up through the ranks of the record engineering and producing world by starting at the bottom. His ability got him noticed, and soon he was working in studios in both the UK and the USA.

Ethan has worked worldwide with Ryan Adams, Ray LaMontagne, Laura Marling, Kings Of Leon, Paul McCartney, CSN, Emmylou Harris and The Jayhawks – to name a few. His work [both as a producer and musician] with Tom Jones has resulted in some of the finest music the Welshman has ever recorded.

Sir Tom told *G&B*: "Musically, Ethan is the most serious man I have ever worked with. What I mean is that he gives me and himself – and the band – space and time to create. He also knows when my voice rings true. In the quietest way, he brings about a self-awareness in everyone, so that sounds and expression and meaning can develop. Oh, and he has really nice hair!"

In his own right, Ethan has recorded three albums. The latest, *Silver Liner*, showcases a mix of organic British and Americana roots music, and highlights the talent of not only Johns, but also pedal-steel wizard BJ Cole, bassist Nick Pini, violinist Georgina Leach and drummer Jeremy Stacey – known collectively as The Black Eyed Dogs. There are some great guest appearances too, from long-time friend [former Eagle] Bernie Leadon and country music favourite Gillian Welch.

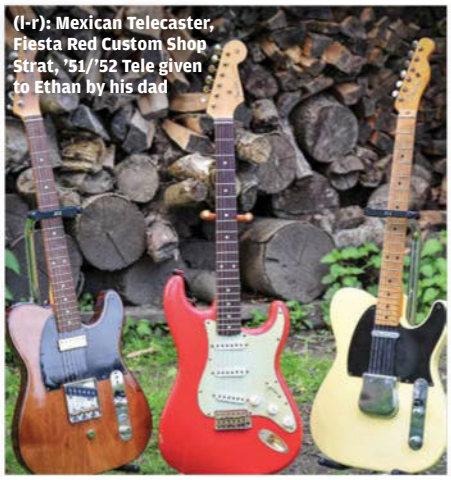
We chatted with Ethan at his West Country studio... and took a peek at some of his wonderful guitars.

Q What was it like growing up in the Johns household?

"Well, there were musicians around – and I was obsessed by music from the age of about three, maybe four. I had discovered my passion for music – and anyone who walked through the door, I was 'on' straight away, because I wanted to learn and explore more about the magic thing I had discovered!

"To me, these were just lovely guys and friends of my dad – no different to anyone else who had a friend or an uncle who was into music. But there were two guys in particular who I developed a relationship with from an early age; Andy Fairweather-Low and Bernie Leadon – both incredible guitar players, and both very good friends of the family to this day. I was just really lucky to have access to some incredible world-class musicians. And I learned some fundamental lessons from these guys about tone: the sounds you make are coming from your hands, not the guitar you are playing. I had this demonstrated to me by Eric Clapton. It was a key moment in my life, I was about 11 or 12 years old, and Eric was down at our house rehearsing for the Ronnie Lane ARMS Concert. I had just got my first serious amplifier – a Sessionette 75, which was quite complicated, and I was struggling with it a bit. I had a Strat, so I asked Eric if he would help me figure out what this amp did. Eric very graciously said 'Yes, of course', and he picked up my guitar, switched on

Ethan's Blue Paisley Fender Precision Bass



(l-r): Mexican Telecaster, Fiesta Red Custom Shop Strat, '51/'52 Tele given to Ethan by his dad

(l-r): 1990s Firebird, Flying V, 1963 SG

the amp... never touched the controls, but on that first note it was 'instant Eric'. It was a great sound, like a lightbulb moment. It's in your fingers, man, not really anything to do with the guitar. I mean, 'Blackie' was a great guitar, but just the one he liked to play – he could play anything and sound like Eric Clapton.

"I was about 12 or 13, and I was really becoming aware of the pop culture and that whole thing. Up until then, it was sort of beautifully innocent. I've got great memories of going and hanging out at recording sessions, like when Bernie Leadon bought Neil Young's house in Topanga Canyon. He made a record about 1974 to '75 with my dad, out there in California. I was just mesmerised by the place, the atmosphere and the music being made, just soaking it all in!"

> "Technology has its uses, but I still find the amps from the 50s and 60s to be the most expressive"

Q When do you feel that you first associated with the musical direction that you would eventually take?

"Well, the first instrument that introduced me to music was the Appalachian dulcimer, and it was instant love. Then it was drums, and then guitar. I got my first guitar when I was five, but it was drums that dominated my time. I'd play guitar at night, in the dark when I went to bed!

"There was a Fender Rhodes keyboard in the hallway – and I used to mess around with that a bit. But when dad built the studio there was a Hammond B3 in there, and I would sit for hours on that thing, just listening to the Leslie speeding up and slowing down. Same thing with bass... I love playing bass, and I've played bass on a bunch of records, but I wouldn't say I was a bass player.

"It's difficult to detach one instrument from another in terms of what influences the other. There's no doubt that I'm a better drummer because I'm a guitar player, and I'm definitely a better bass player because I'm a drummer. Tone chasing, for me, is about having the colours on the palette. Being able to instantly, and subconsciously, access the tone. That's why valve amplifiers are so important to me, because they are incredibly expressive. The relationship between the musician and the amplifier – and, of course, all the different guitars, models and styles, will influence how you 'push' the sound out of the instrument and through the amplifier.

"If I'm making a recording, or I'm playing with the band or whatever, and I have a sound in my head that I want to create, I want to be able to get to that sound as quickly as possible. It will be like you imagine that sound in your head, and then you'll say 'okay, that's the Selmer [amp] and the Jerry Jones...' and (clicks fingers) you can go there immediately. That's what I guess I mean by tone chasing.

"There's no doubt that technology has its uses, but I have to say, from the point of view of design, I still find the amps from the 50s and 60s to be the most expressive to me, although Fender is making great new amplifiers again now. I've just got the Custom Vibrolux silverface, it's incredible and sounds fantastic."

Q Who were your influences outside of Glyn's studio?

"James Honeyman-Scott was a massive influence on me as a guitar player, so was Brian Setzer. Johnny Marr and Paul Weller, those were guys I was paying attention to. But then there was Ry Cooder and Lowell George, and a British slide player called Bryn Haworth, who was pretty amazing.

"My musical tastes have always been really broad. I was always into The Jam... and I remember when the first Van Halen record came out, that blew my head off, incredible stuff! I was just as happy rocking out to Van Halen as I was listening to John Lee Hooker, who I would obsess over. I didn't belong in any 'pigeon hole', there was so much great music – The Specials, The Cure, The Jesus and Mary Chain – all over the shop... music was everywhere! When I discovered Graham Nash's first album, it had such great feel, then Crosby, Stills and Nash, Neil Young and The Grateful Dead – Jerry Garcia and Jimi Hendrix were 'it' for me. I could talk about them all day long!

"To me, the great musicians are putting their personalities on the line. Let's talk about one of my favourite guitar players and songwriters of all time, George Harrison. When you're listening to a George Harrison record, you're listening to him. I'm not listening to his haircut or the cut of his trousers, you know? I'm listening to the guy telling it like it is."

Ethan's Fender tweed collection (l-r): Vibrolux, Champ and Harvard

Q When did everything come into focus?

"The time came at 16. I'd been apprentice to Glyn from the point he built the studio, but I think dad was quite keen for me to find something else to do. I don't think he wanted me to go into the music business. When I realised education didn't hold any more for me and it was time to 'get on with it', Glyn didn't bat an eyelid, he was like, 'Great, so now you've got to go and find a job then'. And that's just what I did. I found a job at a studio in London, worked there for a little while, and then I landed a job at A&M Studios in Los Angeles in about 1987. These incredible musicians would come through the doors. I remember putting microphones on The Edge's guitar cabinets when they were recording *Rattle And Hum*, that was a thrill. I always thought that his sound was just remarkable, and I loved his guitar tones.

"I stayed in LA for a while, then came back to London and did a stint playing drums for Green On Red, which was an incredible learning curve when you're 18. Chuck Prophet is a phenomenal guitar player and one of my favourite musicians. They were a great band, and it was a pretty cool experience. To be honest, the truth is I've been lucky because I have a few different things that I can do. Therefore, I have a few more opportunities, rather than if I was just a drummer, or just a guitarist or just an engineer, or whatever it is.

"It's a juggling act in many ways, but it's brilliant because music is the language. We were talking about working on Tom Jones' album the other day, and Andy Fairweather Low, Jeremy Stacey and Dave Bronze were in the room with Tom. We didn't talk much about the way we were going to make that record, we played a lot. We showed up at the studio every day and picked up our instruments, that's how we talked to each other, and the tape is running all the time. It's a great process, and Tom is a great singer and an interpreter, a really inspiring and cool guy. All three of the Tom Jones records have been great, and on the last record it's all live with no overdubs [unless you hear a keyboard]. It was a very organic process, which brought out the best in everyone. There's a little bit of extra 'special sauce' on those records – you hear it and you feel it, you know?"

Q Let's talk about your own records, especially *Silver Liner*...

"*Silver Liner*, in fact the last two albums, were written leading right up to the time we recorded. Jeremy Stacey was amazing on this album, he was the drummer, backing vocalist, engineer and producer. I stepped away completely from the production role and Jeremy did everything. You have to have trust and faith in someone else to steer the ship, because I don't believe you can truly judge your own performances.

"We cut *Silver Liner* live to tape, and there's a lot of first takes on this record. For me, I was just in the moment, and as open as I could possibly be during a take; responsive, yet at the same time putting out the feel that needed to be put out as a rhythm guitar player. I played my 1969 Martin D-18 pretty much for the whole record – but on *Six And Nine* I used my '73 D-28. For the electrics, I used my Gretsch White Falcon, a Strat and Jeremy's early-70s Goldtop Deluxe, all through my old tweed Fender Harvard amp.

"One thing that's important to say is, I've never stopped writing songs, I've been writing music and songs pretty much all my life. The desire to record and release those songs just hasn't been present, until the key moment, when Laura Marling was listening to some of my tracks at the end of a session. She said, 'that's really lovely, come and sing it at Laura Marling And Friends at the Royal Festival Hall'. So, she got me up there, and I was reminded at that point about the circle of writing, performing, sharing, and that you're missing a huge part of what it's all about if you don't sing them to people." >

(l-r): Martin D-41, 00028 and 1969 D-18

(l-r): Gretsch White Falcon, prototype Gretsch given to Ethan by Graham Nash, 1962 6120.

Ethan's Mexican Tele with a Parsons B-Bender

A 1960s Supro Corsica (left), just one of Ethan's many vintage amps

Q So, how do you feel about being Ethan Johns the performer, as opposed to being an engineer, producer or musician with someone else?

"You know, that's a really interesting observation, and I think the thing that prevented me doing it for all that time was that I really didn't want that kind of attention. In fact, I know that was a big part of it, because I did have a band in the early 1990s, which ended up becoming Mike Peters' band [The Poets Of Justice], but I didn't enjoy it, and I didn't like being the frontman at all, actually.

"Maybe I was worried about being judged. I'm a very honest musician, there's no defence mechanism. I am who I am and I play what I play, so it's very personal, and I think that when I was younger, the idea that some people may not like it was hurtful to me. But now, I don't care if people like it or not, and I know that sounds pretty harsh because nothing makes me happier than to connect with a room full of people, and that's kind of the point for putting all this music out into the world.

"My whole deal is to improve. I want to keep getting better, because staying at home in isolation is incredibly restrictive. There's no feedback, so you've got to get out there because it's like a transfer of energy."

> "I don't like to use pedals for tone. Sound is all about your fingers, guitar choice and the amp"

Q Let's talk about your collection of guitars and amplifiers...

"When I was five years old, I was gifted a Fender Bronco, and I still have it and have used it 'high strung' for many years – a great guitar! But the Bronco was three-quarter scale, and when I was about 13, I picked up a Hondo Les Paul. My dad could see I wanted something a bit more serious, so for Christmas he got me a really nice early Custom Shop Strat, one of the first ever made. This was before the first reissues came out, they had built a few of them to show Fender what a good idea it would be to reissue the old stuff.

"It was a great guitar, but sadly it was stolen about 10 years ago. It was my first 'proper' guitar, and a gift from my dad, so it meant a lot to me. That Strat was my main guitar until I was about 21, and then I branched out into vintage Gretsch. I bought a 1962 Tennessean when I was about 17, which was a great guitar, then a '58 Roundup, but eventually had to sell them. Then I bought a '62 6120 Nashville, which I have used a lot, and still do today as

Ethan's collection of Kay instruments, bought in the USA

it's a great guitar. I also bought a 1919 Gibson harp guitar about the same time.

"Then I started to use a Fender Telecaster that my dad had bought in the 70s, which was reported to be a '51. I started to use that quite regularly, and it turns out it's got 'January 1952' pencilled on the neck, but parts of it are 1951 so it's right on the cusp, it's an amazing guitar! I was using it more and more, so eventually dad gave it to me, and I still use that Tele a lot. It's one of the best guitars I've ever played, and I've played a lot of guitars over the years!

"It's the 'tone quest'. The more you get into tone chasing, the more you start to realise the sounds these guitars have in them. I struggled for so many years, I had to sell a lot of guitars. You know how it is; you go on tour, make a few quid and buy a vintage guitar. A few months later, you've run out of money and have to sell it again! I had a 1962 Mary Kaye Fender Jazzmaster that I bought in 1994, an amazing guitar, wrote a bunch of songs on it, you know? It was like there was a whole world of sounds in this guitar, completely unique and not like anything else. I also had a Gibson J-160E at the same time, which was a pretty good guitar, but I sold it and bought a square-shouldered Hummingbird – but sold that as well. I had a 1965 blackface Fender Deluxe, too at that point, but it was stolen. A lot of great stuff I've either had to sell – or it's been stolen.

"For me, rule number one is sound in the room; and that's when the amp collection really began to grow, because I started to get into five watts, 10 watts, 15 watts, 22 watts – it depended on what you were doing. It became quite crucial to get the right tone, at the right volume. I don't like to use pedals for tone, that's the main thing, because it interferes with me communicating with the amp. Sound is all about your fingers, guitar choice and the amp."

Airline (left) and Jerry Jones guitars

Q So, what's in the future?

"I don't really know. The bottom line is I've become a really useful record producer – as in, the more I do it the better I get, I think. So it would be silly to stop, because I'm good at it, you know? And I enjoy it. Making records, I mean how do I even begin to describe what that means to me? The opportunity to create something as extraordinary as an album, talk about being lucky enough to do something with your life! I'm never going to stop doing it, there's no way. As long as I continue to be fortunate enough to have talented and inspired artists with something to say calling me up and asking me to help them, I'm going to keep doing it. I've got a busy festival and gigging season with my own band, The Black Eyed Dogs, and also The Jayhawks. I'm up to my eyes in stories and lyrics for a new album, so I'm busy writing – I've got a whole stack of material to get through!"

Eleanor Jane

10 TOP TIPS Mark Tremonti

Mark Tremonti's monster tone and technique didn't happen overnight. Grab your pens and paper, it's time to go back to school...

Interview **Mark Alexander**

1 Build strength for legato

"The place to start would be a thing I found Rusty Cooley came up with that he called his 'legato workout'. He came out with this DVD called *Shred Guitar Manifesto* and he starts it off with his legato warm-up workout. I stuck to that for a while to build up strength, and that slowly developed into what I'm doing now. It definitely helped me out a lot. During the workout, he used every single-finger combination of hammer-ons and pull-offs all the way up the neck. It was all about building strength for any combination of anything you could ever think of. So it's really a strength and dexterity exercise. You slowly but surely translate that into real playing. It was really vital to me for developing my legato skills. It's about repetition. Doing it over, over and over again. I did Rusty's legato workout for eight months and I would take about an hour to do it. After a while, it becomes something you don't have to do as much. You've got to get through it, though, even for six months. It's really going to help you out. It helps you develop your strength in your left hand."

2 Keep learning

"I'm always working on new stuff. Right now, I am mostly working on developing my

3 Tone notes

"A lot of tone is in your fingers, but a lot comes from your right hand as well. I developed a lot of my sound by learning from the old-school speed metal down-picking, palm-muted type of rhythm stuff. The tone I would always go after from my rig would be what sounded best when I was palm-muting, downstroke chords. That was the essence of my tone. Strings can also have an effect. I use a combination of 11s on the bottom and 10s on the top – the lower I go in tuning, the bigger the strings. However, sometimes I feel if the strings are too big, you start losing some of the edge on your tone, so I try to make sure that doesn't happen. Always be aware that the thicker your strings are, the rounder your sound is going to be, so if you have thicker-gauge strings, you'll have to play with your EQ to brighten up the sound a little bit."

right hand more; using more of that country, double back beat, flatpicking-with-two-fingers approach. It's a whole other world to dive into and I've had fun doing it. It's a shame to focus on using a pick in your right hand when you have your whole hand to use. There are so many different approaches and tonalities you can get out of your fingers. It's an exciting new world. So far, I'm just trying to learn as many licks as I can. It's a never-ending quest to learn as many new tricks as possible. I am always trying to learn as much as I can."

4 Ditch the metronome

"I like to play to a real drum beat, so I'll either find a drum loop or a song to play along with. Metronomes, to me, make you play a little stiffer. If you play along to a backing track or something like that, it's more fun and more effective. It would drive me crazy just playing to a metronome for hours and hours. It's definitely the better route."

5 Warm up

"I do a lot of playing throughout the day, so I'm pretty well warmed up by the time I go on stage because I've been messing around with guitars all day. For instance, I do guitar clinics before shows, and that keeps me sharp. I really enjoy doing them. But before I do a clinic, I'll warm up by playing to some backing tracks. It's the best way for me. It's about getting into improvisation. I'll pick random stuff out of my iTunes library and play along to whatever I stumble across and try to switch it up as much as possible, although it doesn't always work. If I'm warming up and the chord changes are too fast, if it's a little jazzy, I'll skip to the next tune. I just focus on getting my feel right and not hurt my brain trying to follow complex chord changes. If it's a warm-up, it's a warm-up. If I'm trying to do some jazzier stuff, then I take my time." >

Getty Images

6 Get used to singing and playing together

"I've been doing it for so long now, it's become second nature to me. But for a new player, my advice would be to start singing as early as possible. Being a songwriter is one of the most important things. I believe it's more important than being a great guitar player, because you will always have a gig; you won't have to look for songwriters to be in bands with. So, from the beginning, try to sing along with your playing. That way, when you have to play and sing at the same time, it shouldn't be such a huge change for you."

> "It's a never-ending quest to learn as many new tricks as possible. I'm always trying to learn"

7 Mix it up

"I never took guitar lessons but I've met a lot of people who have, and I think it's good advice to try out new teachers every year. You don't want to become that teacher – you want to develop your own style. If you stick with the same teacher, you'll end up sounding just like them. Even if you have a favourite guitar player and you're trying to learn their licks, switch it up because you'll start morphing into that player. I always jumped around. I loved speed metal, so a lot of the licks and tricks I learned had a lot to do with my right-hand playing. It wasn't a conscious thing, it just happened, but I wanted to learn as many of my favourite songs as possible and they just happened to be by different players."

8 Be patient

"The biggest thing is to be patient. A lot of guitarists quit along the way, because they feel they're not moving fast enough. I've had so many times when I thought I was a horrible player, but I've learned that if you stick with something and try, try and try, you'll eventually get it. Having that patience is key. Be persistent, and know that you're going to make some mistakes along the way."

> "Having patience is key. Be persistent and know you're going to make some mistakes"

Getty Images

9 Find new styles

"I love messing around with the blues. It's kinda the stuff I listen to when I'm trying to learn new licks and tricks. When I try to find a different style of playing, that's the best route because I've already hunted down all the heavy metal, shred kinda guys, now it's time to diversify. I love Derek Trucks, Joe Bonamassa, Warren Haynes – that kind of school. They're fantastic."

10 Seeing is believing

"Even today, if I'm trying to learn passages of solos, it's sometimes good to use a looping device. The best ones are the ones with an external mic, where you can record audio from a TV. It's one thing to learn a solo from a CD, but you have to have a really good ear to pick out whether a note is being played on a G or a D string. It takes a while to develop that skill, but if you have a device on which you can record and loop, you can watch and have the audio so you can see it and hear each section and really hone in on what people are playing. I think it makes a big difference. You can see the position on the neck where they're playing by watching the video and you can hear the audio for the minutia."

Check out Mark Tremonti's enviable technique on his band's third album, *Dust*.

LISTEN UP

CREED

Human Clay (1999)

Creed's second album was the band's most successful, selling 20 million copies worldwide. The album's fourth single, *With Arms Wide Open*, won a Grammy Award.

ALTER BRIDGE

Blackbird (2007)

Tremonti's new band emerged from the shadow of Creed with their second long-player, with some of his best playing to date backed up by vocalist Myles Kennedy's contributions.

TREMONTI

Dust (2016)

Tremonti's third album with his self-fronted project is arguably his best. Recorded during the same sessions as 2015's *Cauterize*, Tremonti and Eric Friedman serve up a dark and heavy tour de force of speed metal and thrash.

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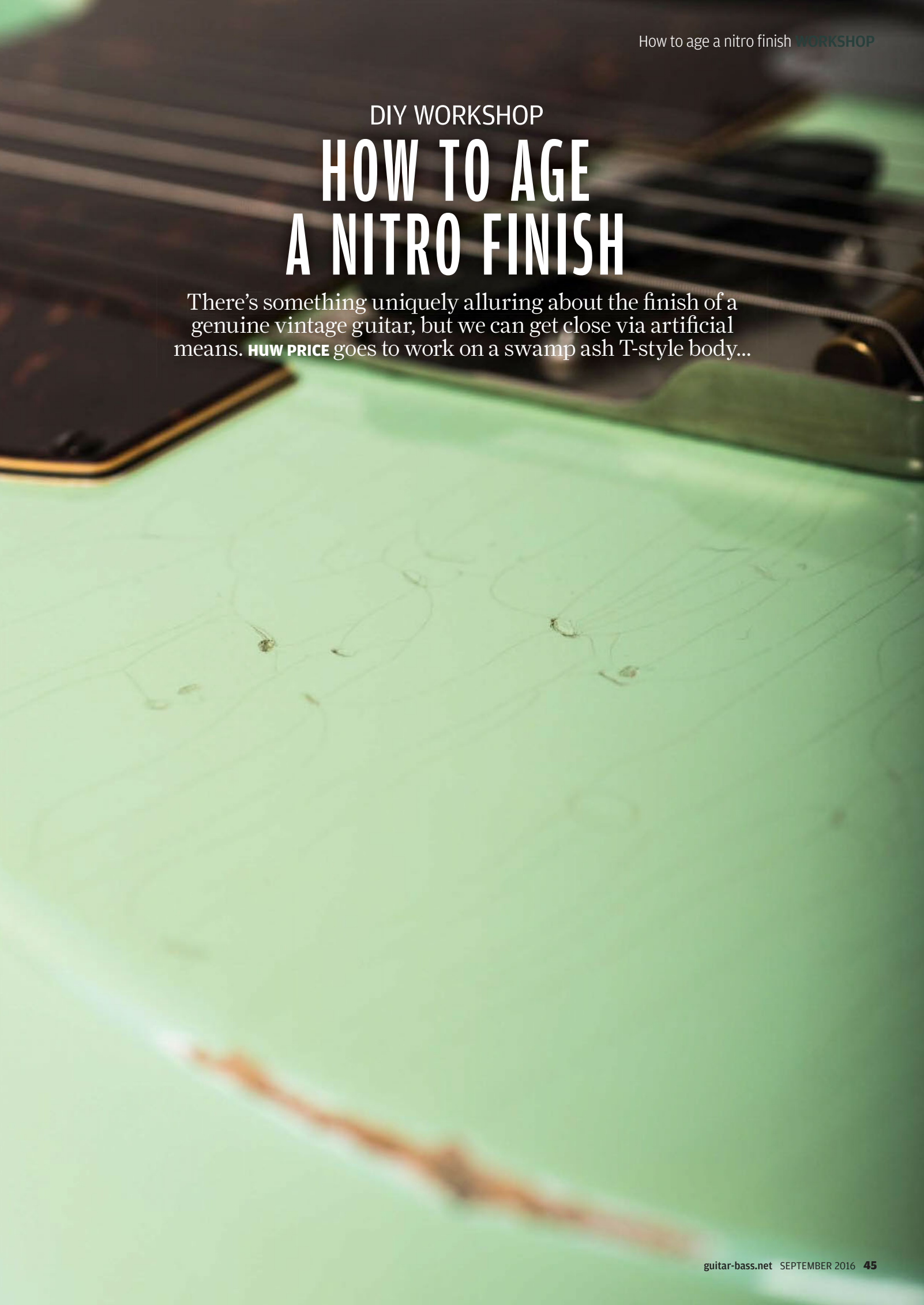
DIY WORKSHOP

HOW TO AGE A NITRO FINISH

There's something uniquely alluring about the finish of a genuine vintage guitar, but we can get close via artificial means. **HUW PRICE** goes to work on a swamp ash T-style body...



1 The masking tape is removed carefully to reveal base wood so there will be no lacquer between the bridge and body. Excess grain filler has plugged the string holes, but it helps to prevent the wood from swelling and cracking the finish while wet sanding and it can be drilled out later

2 Masking tape protects the bottom of the neck pocket from the lacquer so the neck joint will be wood-on-wood contact

3 You can make a mini sanding block from a small offcut of hardwood and double-sided tape. Here, it has been used to remove sprayover from the edge of the neck pocket

4 This is the point of no return because it's the last time this beautiful nitro finish will ever look like new

We have previously covered the process of finishing a guitar body and will no doubt do so again in one form or another. So the starting point for this project is a finished and polished body with a nitrocellulose finish. This could be a body you have sprayed yourself with the intention of distressing, or a factory finish on a body of a guitar you own already. The crucial bit is the nitrocellulose finish because if it's poly, oil, acrylic or anything else, none of the following techniques will work.

This project was enjoyable because there was no pressure to create something vintage authentic. The brief was merely a Surf Green finish with medium distress and lots of lacquer checking. The body was a swamp ash T-style finished with clear cellulose sealer coats, a white base coat, Surf Green and several layers of light tint and clear lacquer. All the finishing materials came from Steve Robinson at Manchester Guitar Tech, and we would highly recommended that company.

Something different

Much is made of the tonal benefits of wood-to-wood and wood-to-metal interfaces, with neck pockets left unfinished, and the likes of Eric Johnson advocate the removal of finish beneath the bridge area. Working on the assumption that no harm could come from that approach and it may actually result in enhanced tone, I decided to try something new.

Over the years, I have built a handful of acoustic guitars and it's common practice to apply masking tape to the front in the area where the bridge is destined to be. Wood glue is designed to stick wood to wood and not wood to lacquer, so the masking tape makes it quicker and easier to expose the bare wood after the finish has been applied. With that in mind, I carefully masked off the area under the bridge, following a line just inside the outer edges of the bridge plate. The tape had to be left in situ until the finish had cured properly and the cutting and polishing process had been completed. To remove the tape, I scored around the edges with a craft knife then cut across the middle of the pickup rout. I peeled the tape from the outside in to reduce the risk of causing damage to the finish **1**.

I followed the same procedure for the neck pocket, cutting the masking tape just inside the outer edges of the neck pocket **2**. After removing the tape, I sanded away the overspray with a small block **3**. When this guitar is finally assembled, both the neck and bridge will be coupled directly to the body.

Ding dong

At the start of this process, you may well find yourself staring at

a shiny and pristine finish. This will be your final opportunity to ask yourself if you really want to go through with the process, because there's no going back 4.

My approach is to begin by adding dings, dents and chips to the finish because when I get the lacquer to check later, the lines will form around these marks. Look closely at genuine vintage finishes and you'll see that's how things tend to happen in the 'natural world', and it can look amazing 5.

Like the guys at Fender and Gibson, I collect several bunches of keys and simply drop them onto the body. Remember to do the sides as well as the front and back – and be aware that the longer the drop, the deeper the dents.

It's actually quite hard to gauge because dents that are seemingly superficial can look far more prominent later on. Adding too many chips and deep dents can look a bit over the top. Before dinging up the finish, I fit the string ferrules, pickguard, bridge, neck plate and control plate because it's unrealistic to damage the finish under those areas. Having them in situ provides a modicum of protection in the surrounding areas and will give you more realistic results 6.

I also try to tap the finish strategically with blunt objects and screwdriver shafts. Achieving a convincing look requires variety and randomisation 7. You can go for larger chips around the edges, and I sometimes use a dental tool to flake off the lacquer 8. Look for pictures of genuine vintage guitars with the same body shape as you are working on and you will be able to identify the areas that tend to take the brunt of things and copy the wear patterns.

I'm partial to a bit of rub-through on the upper bout, but many artificially-aged instruments are merely sanded in this area. When that's done, you get to see the layers of tinted topcoats, colour and base coats and the wood beneath. It's a nice effect, but it's rare to see genuine vintage guitars with that sort of wear – and the sanding lines can be a giveaway.

In my experience, vintage edges tend to be more jagged and rough. To simulate the effect, I rub through the finish with slightly damp 1000 grit wet and dry paper, followed by finer grades of micromesh 9. It's actually quite a slow and gentle process that doesn't require specialist 'tools' such as bicycle chains or belt sanders. To achieve the jagged edges, I flake away the finish using my fingernails, taking care to avoid scratching or denting the wood 10.

I don't particularly enjoy this part of the process because at the end of it the body looks worse – more like a nice finish that has been subjected to random acts of violence. Fortunately, however, things start to improve from this point onwards 11. >

5 Notice how the lacquer checking lines correspond with the dings and dents. This is why you have to damage the paintwork before cracking the lacquer

6 All the fixtures and fittings have to go onto the body to ensure they line up properly. The bridge, pickguard and control plate also ensure dings and dents end up in the right places

7 In the natural ageing process, guitar bodies usually get chipped around the bottom edges. Here, the lacquer has been chipped through to expose the wood

8 Loose bits of chipped lacquer never look quite right. You can flake them out and modify the shape and size of the dent using one of these dental tools

9 This area of the upper bout has been rubbed through with very fine wet and dry paper and micromesh cloth. You can see how much lighter the Surf Green looks where the tinted coats have been removed

10 picking away at the edges with a fingernail creates a ragged and jagged edge. We think this looks more authentic than the soft edges of a straightahead rub-through

11 This is how the rub-through ended up looking after the lacquer checking

Checking out

Almost every vintage guitar with a nitrocellulose finish will show some degree of lacquer checking. It's caused by rapid fluctuations in temperature, and over the years can develop into intricate and fascinating patterns that many people find aesthetically pleasing. Needless to say, inducing lacquer checking is a fundamental part of the faux-ageing process.

According to Edwin Wilson, the Gibson Custom Shop's Historic program manager, lacquer from different eras checked in various ways depending on the formulation. So, on a 50s Les Paul you might expect to see the checking lines going from side to side on the body and headstock. On 50s Fenders, the checking generally follows the grain lines, but by the time of guitars made in the mid-60s, when Fender was using Fullerplast as a base coat, the checking often ran side to side. Since it's safe to assume that none of us is equipped or legally entitled to formulate our own lacquer, Gibson and Fender included, the technique used for getting lacquer to check has to be considered carefully. This is why Gibson Custom relies upon a method of razor-cutting checking lines into the lacquer that was made famous by the company's ageing guru Tom Murphy. For the vintage reissue models to look authentic, the lines must have a specific look, so that cannot be left to chance.

Others use the freeze and thaw technique, and for this you'll need patience and a big freezer. Simply put the guitar's body in the freezer overnight, let it thaw out and repeat the process until you see checking lines beginning to develop. Sometimes, it happens straightaway, and sometimes several cycles may be required, but the results can often be excellent.

For this project, I went with my usual method of heating and freezing. The heat comes from a hair dryer or a paint stripper gun. If you use the latter, select the lowest heat setting and keep the gun moving. Remember it's a paint stripper, so it's just as effective on nitrocellulose as it is on B&Q gloss.

The cold comes from an aerosol canister of compressed air held upside down as you spray. Often sold as an air duster, if it says 'do not use upside down' on the can it's probably ideal for relic'ing. It will freeze the surface of the body and create a layer of frosty water instantaneously – good for guitars, but bad for computers.

There is a technique for doing this; gauge the temperature of the lacquer with your fingers as you're heating it and don't try to do the entire surface of the front or back at once. About halfway is about as far as you should go before you freeze it **12**.

I reattached my paint stick to the neck pocket to hold the body

in a vice as I started checking the lacquer. Begin with the sides, apply the heat, freeze the heated area then wait a minute or so until the frosted layer melts off and wipe away the moisture. Remove the body from the vice and hold it up to the light to gauge your progress. At this stage, the cracks may be difficult to see, but once started they'll develop naturally.

There is an unpredictable element to this way of working, and the checking lines tend to go their own way. However, there are a couple of things to be aware of. Firstly, ensure that the compressed air is applied from a distance of 30cm or so from the body. If you go any closer, the lacquer may end up with a 'shattered' look rather than checking lines.

Secondly, be mindful of the way you move the aerosol. If the body is held upright and you move the aerosol across the body, the checking lines will generally follow the grain lines. For this project, the vice held the body sideways, and as I moved the aerosol along its length the checking lines formed mostly across the grain. Again, it must be stressed that this can be a fairly random process, but by following these guidelines you may be able to exert some degree of control.

Cracking up

At this stage in the process, the lacquer checking may be visible only when the body is held at a specific angle to the light. The client had specified 'exaggerated lacquer checking', so I needed to make the lines more clearly visible. For this, I like to use Colron Jacobean Dark Oak woodstain because it's water-thin and wicks straight down into the cracks.

Wear plastic gloves, dampen a bit of folded kitchen paper with the stain and wipe it over the guitar. A little goes a long way, and you should work on small areas until you get a feel for the process. I leave the stain for a few seconds then wipe off the excess with some clean kitchen paper 13 & 14. The remaining stain can be removed with a cloth and a dab of Farecla G3 polishing compound, and the checking lines will show up beautifully against the clean finish 15 & 16.

Although the stain can work wonders for the checking, when it has pooled up in the dents they can be over-emphasised and the guitar may end up looking a bit grotty. If this happens, dip a cotton bud into some clean white spirit and use it to swab out the dents. Some stain will be left behind but the guitar will look cleaner.

Alternatively, if you like the 'road warrior' look, you may decide not to wipe off the stain completely, and leave it in the dents and some areas of the body. In fact, I left some of the surface stain where >

12 A layer of frost on the back of the body after it was sprayed with an inverted air duster aerosol. The lacquer cracks are just beginning to show

13 To highlight the cracks, the body was wiped over with Colron Dark Oak Jacobean stain

14 After a few seconds, you can wipe off the excess stain, but it dries quite quickly and leaves a sticky residue

15 After a rub down with a clean cloth and some Farecla G3 polishing compound we're left with this. Can you make out the lacquer checking?

16 The pickguard and hardware were removed prior to the heat treatment, so the lacquer cracks extend across the pickguard area. Notice how the paint stick has been reattached. Here, we're halfway through polishing the stain off the front

17 The stain pooled up around the ferrules, but we decided to leave it

18 The cracks are quite vibrant, which is as the client requested. If you'd like a bit more subtlety, try diluting the stain or don't stain the body at all

19 It was decided to retain the high-gloss finish and let it dull over time. If you prefer, you can start the process by rubbing the body with very fine micromesh cloth, but it's surprising how a well relic'd guitar will age naturally. With regular use, this guitar might start to look really good over the next year or so

it had pooled up around the string ferrules because I thought it looked cool 17. Let's hope the owner doesn't hit me with a dry cleaning bill somewhere down the line.

Finishing straight

Ultimately, the process of artificially ageing guitars is something that requires practice, and you will certainly develop a feel for it over time. I've detailed the processes that produce results that I find pleasing, and if you like the way this body has turned out they might work for you too 18 & 19.

However, there are other methods that are equally valid and you may wish to try those instead. Since the object is merely to create a look that has the vibe you want, there is no right or wrong way to do it. After all, faux ageing is by definition... faux.

Unfortunately, finishing a body in nitrocellulose can cost £100 or so just for the lacquer, plus it requires a lot of time and careful work. Experimentation is therefore expensive in many ways, so work slowly and methodically. Remember that you can always add to the distress but not take it away. I'll leave you with some wise words from Elliot Easton: "Less is not more. It's less. It may be preferable to more but it is not more."

PARTS LIST & SUPPLIERS

- **All base coats and lacquer** Manchester Guitar Tech - www.manchesterguitartech.co.uk
- **Pickguard, bridge & jack cup** Allparts UK www.allparts.uk.com
- **Swamp ash body** Guitarbuild www.guitarbuild.co.uk
- **String ferrules & blank control plate** Axecaster www.axecaster.co.uk
- **Tools & materials** eBay
  3x compressed air aerosols
  Hair dryer or paint-stripping hot air gun
  Colron Dark Oak Jacobean stain
  Farecla G3 polishing compound

NEXT MONTH...

Huw Price dons the tweed once again as he carries out some unusual restoration and ageing work on a late-50s Fender Bassman

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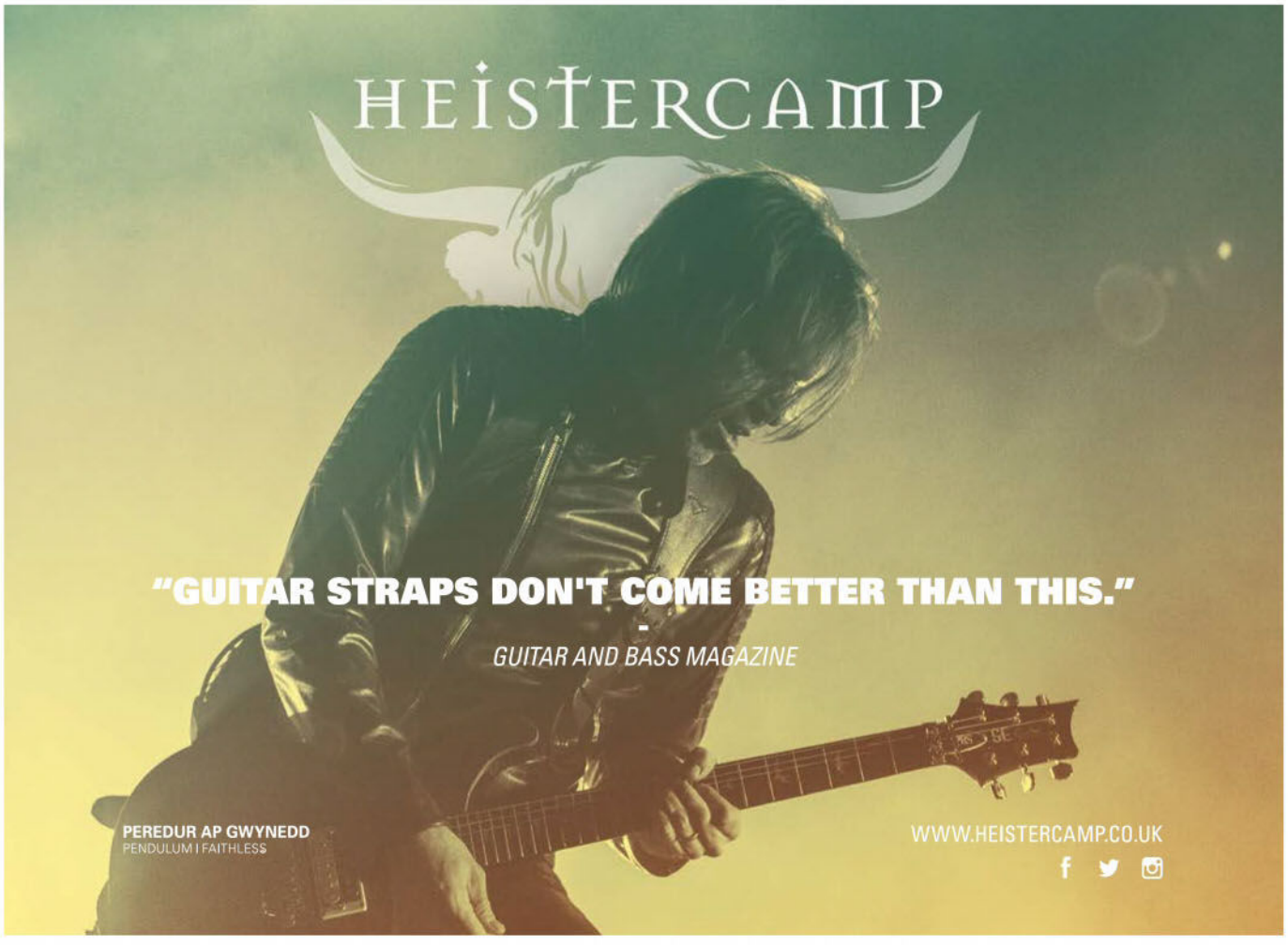
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VOLUME
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K-Line Del Mar

Surf's up, as **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** checks out a cool twang machine named after a Californian beach city...

K-Line Guitars is the brainchild of Chris Kroenlein, a man with decades of experience both in guitar building and repair, along with automotive body painting. Kroenlein has been hand-building instruments in his workshop in the suburbs of St Louis, Missouri since 2004 and our previous encounters with his bolt-on electrics have been thoroughly positive. Particularly memorable was a gorgeous Truxton T-style that was light, wonderfully resonant and had a neck to die for.

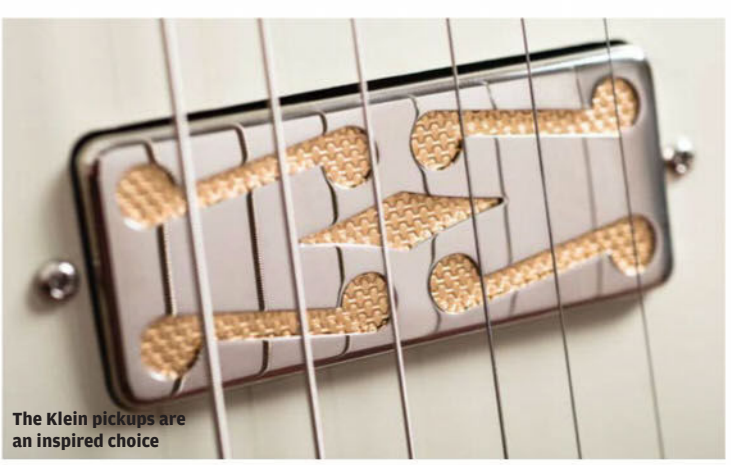
Launched in January, the Del Mar is a more original, offset design, which nods heavily in a westerly direction towards Fullerton and the ocean beyond... but also has an interesting vibe of its own. Kroenlein's experience of replicating vintage finishes means his aged paint jobs are of a very high standard but here, we've got a box-fresh, pristine Dakota Red nitrocellulose finish with a large, three-ply mint-green scratchplate. The contoured alder body follows shortened Jazzmaster lines until you reach the treble-side cutaway, which has a flared horn reminiscent of a 1960s Teisco ET-200.

It's a cool combination of surf-era and pawnshop influences that certainly says 'twang', and this aesthetic is accentuated by a trio of in-vogue Gold Foil pickups wound by respected boutique pickup maker Klein, whose vintage-reproduction Strat units have been hailed in these pages in the past. Though the covers of these Mustache Diamond Gold Foils are designed to resemble old DeArmond single-coils, there are no adjustable polepieces here and the pickups are in fact Firebird-sized mini-humbuckers with bar magnets. With 6.0 (neck), 6.4 (middle) and 6.7k-ohm DC resistance ratings, we're firmly in vintage territory.

Its cool combo of surf-era and pawnshop influences, accentuated by a trio of Gold Foil pickups, certainly says 'twang'

The bolt-on, satin-finished maple neck is described as a medium C and it fattens out satisfyingly above the fourth fret. The fingerboard is an attractive slab of rosewood with a rich, deep-red colouration and player-friendly rolled edges. The 10-inch 'board radius and medium-jumbo fretwire provide a comfortable playing surface for string bends and lead work but, happily, it's not so flat that the retro-looking Del Mar ends up feeling modern to the point of incongruity. Aside from a few barely visible tool marks on the fretboard, the standard of construction and finishing is excellent.

Hardware choices are shrewd; full marks to Kroenlein for opting to >


The Klein pickups are an inspired choice

KEY FEATURES

K-Line Del Mar

- **PRICE** £2,149
- **DESCRIPTION** Offset solidbody, made in USA
- **BUILD** Solid alder body, bolt-on medium C maple neck, 10" radius slab rosewood fingerboard, 21 medium-jumbo frets, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Wilkinson vintage-style vibrato bridge, vintage-style tuners, Electrosocket jack cup
- **ELECTRICS** 3x Klein Mustache Diamond Gold Foil pickups, 5-way blade pickup selector switch, master volume, pull-push master tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 50.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.5lbs/3.4kg
- **FINISHES** Dakota Red nitrocellulose (as reviewed), plus numerous finish and specification options with three levels of ageing
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.coda-music.com** **www.k-lineguitars.com**

Vintage-style tuners and an understated headstock design add to the vintage vibe

The Electrosocket jack cup is a more reliable design than vintage Tele-style sockets

Imagine a 'Stratotele', with the springy clarity of a great Strat and a slice of the Tele's punch and percussive dynamism

use the Electrosocket jack socket cup – it's become a nigh-on-essential upgrade for Telecaster users in recent years and is much more stable and roadworthy than a vintage-style arrangement. Similarly, the Wilkinson vibrato offers subtle innovations: the push-in arm retains a classic feel thanks to its nylon collar, while the block's staggered string spacing is compensated for intonation adjustment, ensuring that each string has the same saddle-to-ball-end length. All that said, as you look at the vibrato from behind the bridge, the bottom-right hand corner of the steel base plate is a little sharp – you'd have to be very unlucky to skewer a fingertip, but we'd still prefer to see the point rounded off.

In use

Imagine a 'Stratotele', with the springy clarity of a great Strat and a generous slice of the satisfying punch and percussive dynamism of a Tele – that's pretty close to what the Del Mar delivers sonically. You get lots of detail too, so it's a wonderfully expressive instrument, with special rewards for those who favour fingers over a pick, though the stinging attack of a hard pick near the bridge is just as moreish.

Add a bit of tweedy break-up and you've got Dave Davies down at the bridge and Jimi up at the neck; Stones fans are also in for a treat, as the bridge pickup does a great Keith sound with a beautiful balance of grit and jangle – then just add spring reverb for a wiry, Ry Cooder *Sister Morphine* slide tone. And while we're splashing around in reverb, it's worth noting that the Del Mar surfs like a pro, too.

The Klein bridge pickup sounds very good indeed and we probably wouldn't have enjoyed spending time with the Del Mar any less had it arrived with only one Gold Foil installed. That said, there are a lot of inspiring sounds here: adding more Strat flavours to the recipe, the 'in-between' positions two and four provide plenty of quack and all the while, that Wilkinson vibrato keeps proceedings stable and in-tune.

The tone control holds a couple of surprises; pulling up the tone pot (not always easy in the heat of battle with a Strat-style knob and sweaty paws) engages the neck pickup when the five-way blade selector switch is in positions one and two. This gives you a lovely Tele-style neck-and-bridge combination in position one and 'everything on' in parallel for maximum quack in position two. Positions three, four and five remain unchanged, but it's a clever way of getting a couple of interesting additional sounds out of an already versatile, yet simple, control setup.

To say that the Del Mar's pricing places it in a crowded area of the market is an understatement, but it's a serious guitar with bags of personality that we like an awful lot. The pickup choice is inspired, but if you want a K-Line in a different configuration then you can spec an instrument with more traditional humbuckers, SSS, HSS, P-90s... on top of that, there's a choice of neck shapes – "the sky is the limit... within reason" – premium tonewoods and various levels of finish distress, though Kroenlein says he "doesn't do the dragged-behind-a-truck look." We suspect that if you dig this guitar you'll struggle to put it down, so that heavy wear might just happen naturally.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Dennis Fano's Novo Guitars Serus T £2,449 sets the standard when it comes to modern boutique offsets, and his **Sectis from £3,499** and **Serus J from £2,899** models were born to surf. His previous company **Fano**'s **Standard JM6** is also well worth a look at £1,699. Finally, if you can find a Fender Custom Shop **Ancho Poblano Stratocaster £2,639**, this limited-edition 2015 firecracker is worth selling an organ for.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Brings something fresh to the boutique offset market
+ Wonderful-sounding Klein pickups
+ Balances well when strapped on
+ Comfy and highly playable

- Sharp corner on vibrato plate

We've admired Chris Kroenlein's guitars for a while now and this certainly doesn't disappoint. A cool offset that sounds and plays as good as it looks

9/10

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Patrick James Eggle 96 Drop Top Myrtlewood

An exotic bolt-on hot-rod crafted lovingly in Shropshire. Will **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** have a timber tantrum?

In 2015, Patrick James Eggle's glorious Macon Carved Top scooped a highly commended badge in the 'best electric guitar over £1,000' category of our Gear Of The Year awards and heralded the return to electric manufacture of one of the UK's finest luthiers. As we wrote at the time, "and what a return" – the chambered double-cut was a work of fine six-string art with serious tones, glorious tonewoods and a fabulous neck.

Georgia is once again on Eggle's mind as he follows the Macon (named after the city known as 'the Heart of Georgia' that gave birth to Little Richard and raised Otis Redding) with the 96 – named after the state's west-east highway. Based on a personal gigging guitar that Eggle developed over a decade ago while living in the Netherlands, the 96 is available in Carved Top and, as here, Drop Top incarnations, the latter so-named because of the way its top follows the curve of the forearm contour.

Our review instrument's top is a striking section of myrtlewood; Eggle, long a devotee of exotic timbers, describes its tonal properties as similar to maple, but while maple "grows like a weed" all over North America, myrtlewood (*Umbellularia californica*) is considerably more scarce, much-prized and native only to the coastal forests of California and southern Oregon.

It's not just the wood that's special or carefully chosen here; the smooth-operating Gotoh vibrato bridge features a bespoke block hand-milled from solid bell brass and custom KTS titanium saddles, while the handwound pickups come courtesy of Mojo Pickups' Marc Ransley in West Yorkshire. All three pickups are scatter-wound and feature alnico V magnets. The neck and middle single coils are wound with 42-AWG wire and have a DC resistance of 6 and 6.2k respectively, while the 14k bridge humbucker is wound with 43-AWG wire.

In common with every example of Patrick's luthiery we've encountered, the 96's neck feels instantly inviting

If the 96 is the Fender-style yin to the Macon's Gibson-esque yang, in common with every example of Patrick's luthiery we've ever encountered, the 96's neck feels instantly inviting. Aside from the visual appeal of the incredible figuring in the roasted maple that shimmers under lights like water lapping at the shore in some tropical lagoon, it also smells delicious – like caramel.

We've discussed the weight and resonance benefits of torrefaction in these pages several times of late and are confirmed believers, but it certainly doesn't do a neck any harm when it's also carved into a beautifully soft V >

Look at that roasted flame maple; you can almost smell the caramel from here...

KEY FEATURES

Patrick James Eggle 96 Drop Top Myrtlewood

- **PRICE** £2,995 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-cutaway electric guitar, made in UK
- **BUILD** Swamp ash body with myrtlewood drop top, roasted flame maple 'soft V' neck, Santos rosewood fingerboard with 22 Sintoms 230140 frets and mother-of-pearl dot inlays, Tusq nut
- **HARDWARE** Modified Cosmo Black Gotoh vibrato bridge with titanium saddles and brass block, Gotoh locking tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Mojo single coils (neck and middle), 1x Mojo humbucker (bridge), 5-way blade pickup selector, master volume, pull-push master tone (activates coil split)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.8mm at nut, 51.4mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.9lbs/3.5kg
- **FINISH** Natural top, 'Dark Grained' matt limed back
- **OPTIONS** Flame or quilt maple, walnut and curly koa tops; neck P-90 also available
- **CONTACT** Patrick James Eggle Guitars 01691 661777 **www.eggle.co.uk**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Tom Anderson's **Walnut Drop Top** **£3,670** is another highly-evolved S-type with pedigree, while the **Charvel Guthrie Govan Signature San Dimas** **£2,965** features a 'caramelised' flame maple neck good enough to take a bite out of.

shape that disappears into the smoothly rolled edges of a Santos rosewood fretboard, the access to the upper reaches of which is an absolute joy thanks to an elegantly engineered heel. We've said it before and we'll doubtless say it again: Patrick knows how to make a fine guitar, alright.

There's plenty of power under the Mojo bridge humbucker's brushed cover, but crucially there's character too

In use

With a hotter-than-vintage output, there's plenty of power under the Mojo bridge humbucker's brushed cover, but crucially there's character too. Into a hot tweed amp with a decent amount of volume, we end up spending more time than is decent lost in chewy Americana riffs and chords. If you think a drop-top hot-rod S-type can't do roots with authenticity you are sorely mistaken.

It's louder and more raucous than our trusty Gibson ES-335's bridge unit – also wound by Mojo – pushing our amp into overdrive much more quickly but not unmusically so. And while many guitar makers boast that rolling back the volume yields usable cleans, the 96 actually delivers in this regard, retaining treble and jangle in a highly usable way. When we unscrew the back panel, it's no surprise that there's what appears to be a treble bleed circuit in situ on the volume pot.

Up the gain to hard and heavy alt.rock levels and the 96 stays free of unwanted microphony, but provides a suitably robust voice for filthy rhythms, singing lead and chuggy palm-mutes. The single coils provide a bright, cutting and percussive array of Strat-type clean tones with explosive dynamics and no hint of mud, while the pull-push tone control offers yet more variation with its stealthy bridge pickup coil-split.

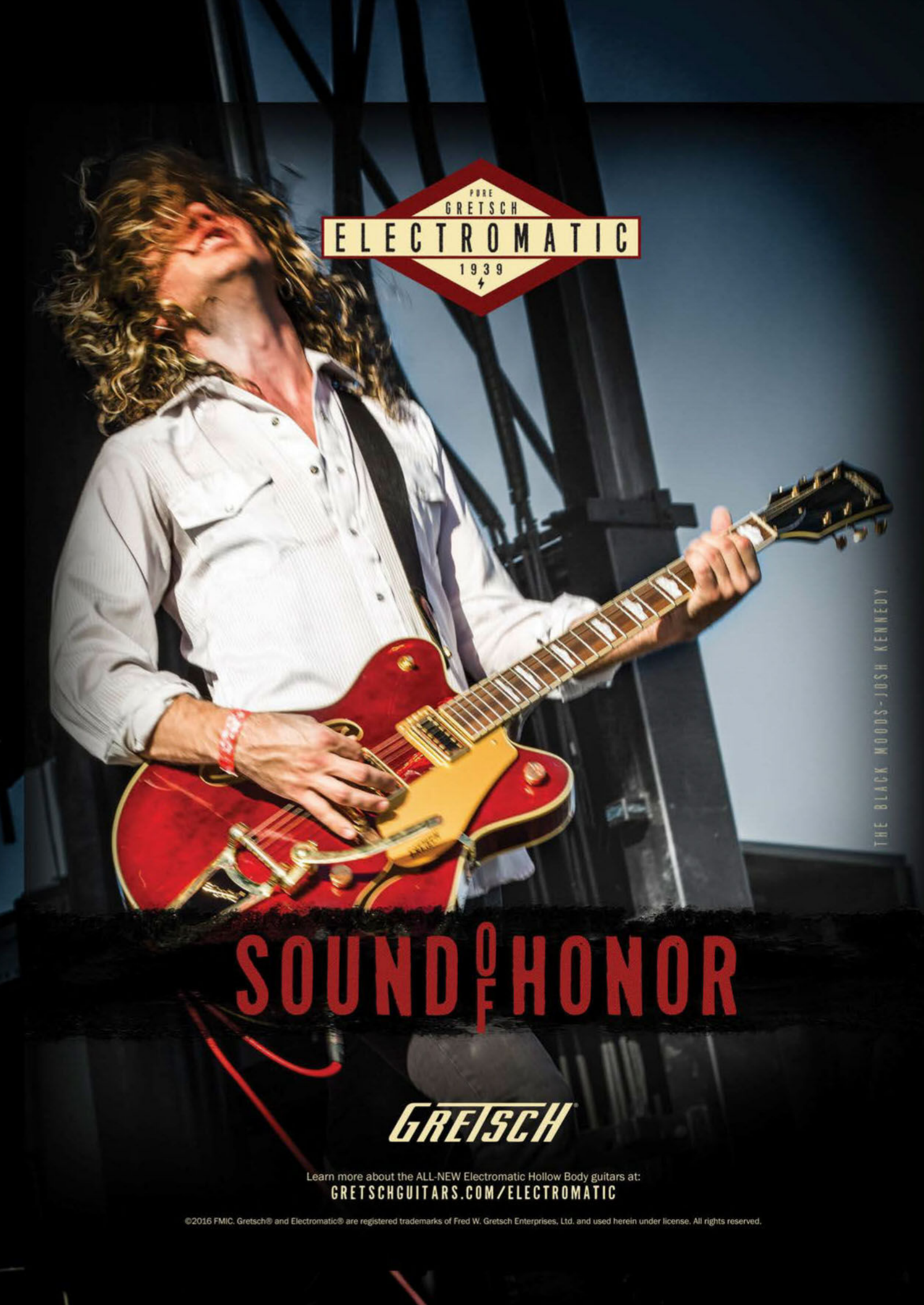
Overall, the 96's single-coil voices have a sonic signature that pushes us towards the funkier end of the S-type spectrum, and although there are some cool blues tones to be had when you boost the mids, they lean closer to slick and suited than they do to down and dirty.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ The neck is a treat for the palm, with superlative upper-fret access for a bolt-on
+ Covers a lot of sonic ground
+ It even smells good
- Some may prefer their single-coil tones a little raunchier

From slinky to chunky, this toneful and versatile hot-rod is a lesson in luthiery from a master

8/10



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Swart MOD 84

Retro Americana is Michael Swart's stock-in-trade, but could his first production EL84 amp signal the beginning of a quiet revolution at this respected boutique brand? **HUW PRICE** finds out

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

The look and tone of Swart amps is so resolutely retro Americana, some may be surprised to see quintessentially British EL84s in this new model. Then again, Michael Swart is an avowed fan of vintage Gibson amps and EL84s were used in those, under the US moniker 6BQ5.

So, the MOD 84 has a pair of cathode-biased EL84s generating 15 watts, with the assistance of two 12AX7s and a 12DW7 driver for the short-tank spring reverb. A single tone control combines with a three-way interactive EQ switch and a tube tremolo with speed and depth controls.

The finger-jointed open-back pine cabinet contains a (bass resonance) Celestion G12M Creamback, although other options are available, including two 10-inch drivers. Components are mounted on turret board and consist of carbon composite resistors, Mallory 150 coupling capacitors, Sprague and JJ electrolytics and high-purity copper hookup wire.

In use

At the risk of getting myself in trouble with the tone police, I'll confess that I consider the tonal attributes of different power valves to be a bit over egged. After all, a Blues Junior sounds like a Fender amp despite its EL84 power valves, and a pair of 5881s won't turn a Marshall into a Fender Bassman. Installing EL84s in a Fender Deluxe to make it sound more 'British' is akin to installing humbuckers in a Strat hoping it will sound like a Les Paul.

I'll concede that all the common power valves do have defining sonic characteristics, but skilled amp designers can wrest pretty much any quality out of them, depending on the way the whole amp circuit is configured and the speaker that's used. The MOD 84 is a case in point, thanks to its highly effective EQ voicing switch – which actually selects three different values for the treble-bypass capacitor across the volume control.

Even so, the model designation is surely intended to evoke the scooters-and-scuffles era of British pop music, so I went in search of Voxy tones. Flicking the voicing switch towards the rear of the cabinet moves the MOD 84 into a very rich and creamy place with an undeniably strong Dick Denney influence. The Vox tone in question would be a non-top boost AC30 or AC10, because this setting is by no means bright sounding and it's also the lowest in gain. Single notes are full bodied and chords have a 60s-style dark jangle. The volume and tone controls interact in the tweed-Fender style, so turning the tone up increases gain and treble. Overdrive only really gets going when volume is in its final quarter, and pushing the tone above halfway gradually introduces a smooth breakup overlaid with a deliciously warm sizzle.

The middle setting opens up the treble range with a full frequency boost, and the third setting is louder again, with bit more upper midrange push.

The differences between these two modes diminish as the volume and tone are turned up, and then become more apparent once again near max out. Middle mode's gentler mids provide a tad more clarity and a bit less compression, while the third mode actually gets slightly darker when at full strap. >

The MOD is surely intended to evoke the scooters-and-scuffles era of British pop, so I went in in search of Voxy tones

The MOD 84 comes in a variety of vintage-inspired tolex finishes – tweed is $100 extra but we love this blue sparkle and racing stripe combination

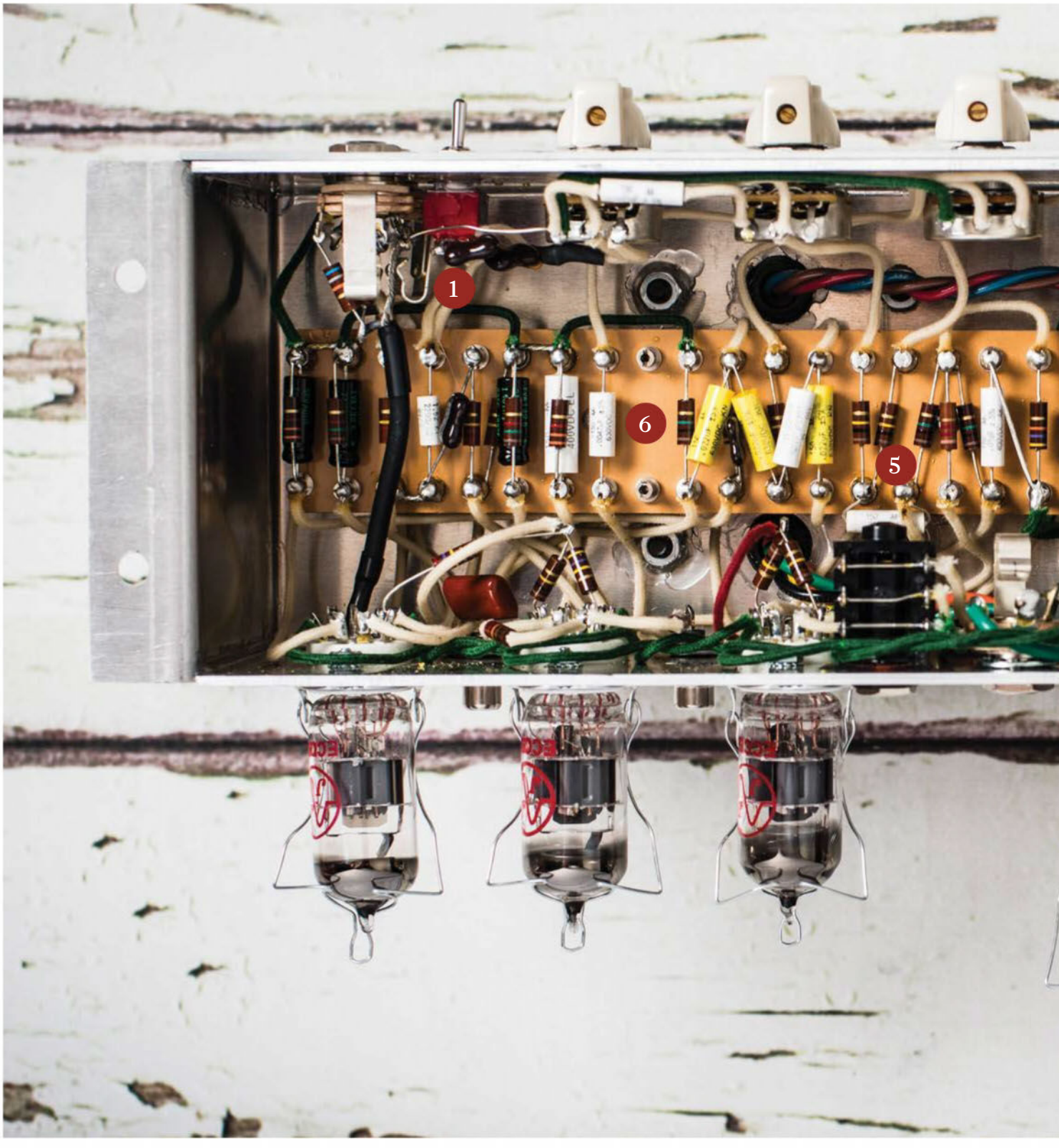
KEY FEATURES

Swart MOD 84

- **PRICE** £1,699
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel cathode-biased valve combo with reverb and tremolo, made in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 15W
- **VALVES** 2x 12AX7, 1x 12DW7, 2x EL84, 1x GZ34
- **CONTROL PANEL** Power, standby, hi/lo input sockets, interactive 3-way EQ switch, volume, tone, space, speed, depth
- **SPEAKER** 1x Celestion G12M Creamback
- **DIMENSIONS** 660x400x270mm
- **WEIGHT** 17.7kg/39.02lbs
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.swartamps.com**

Anatomy of...

1 Papa's Got A Brand New Bag
Swart's three way EQ switch works on the same principle as a Fender 'bright' switch, but it places three different capacitance settings across the volume control to alter the frequency range of the 'treble bleed'

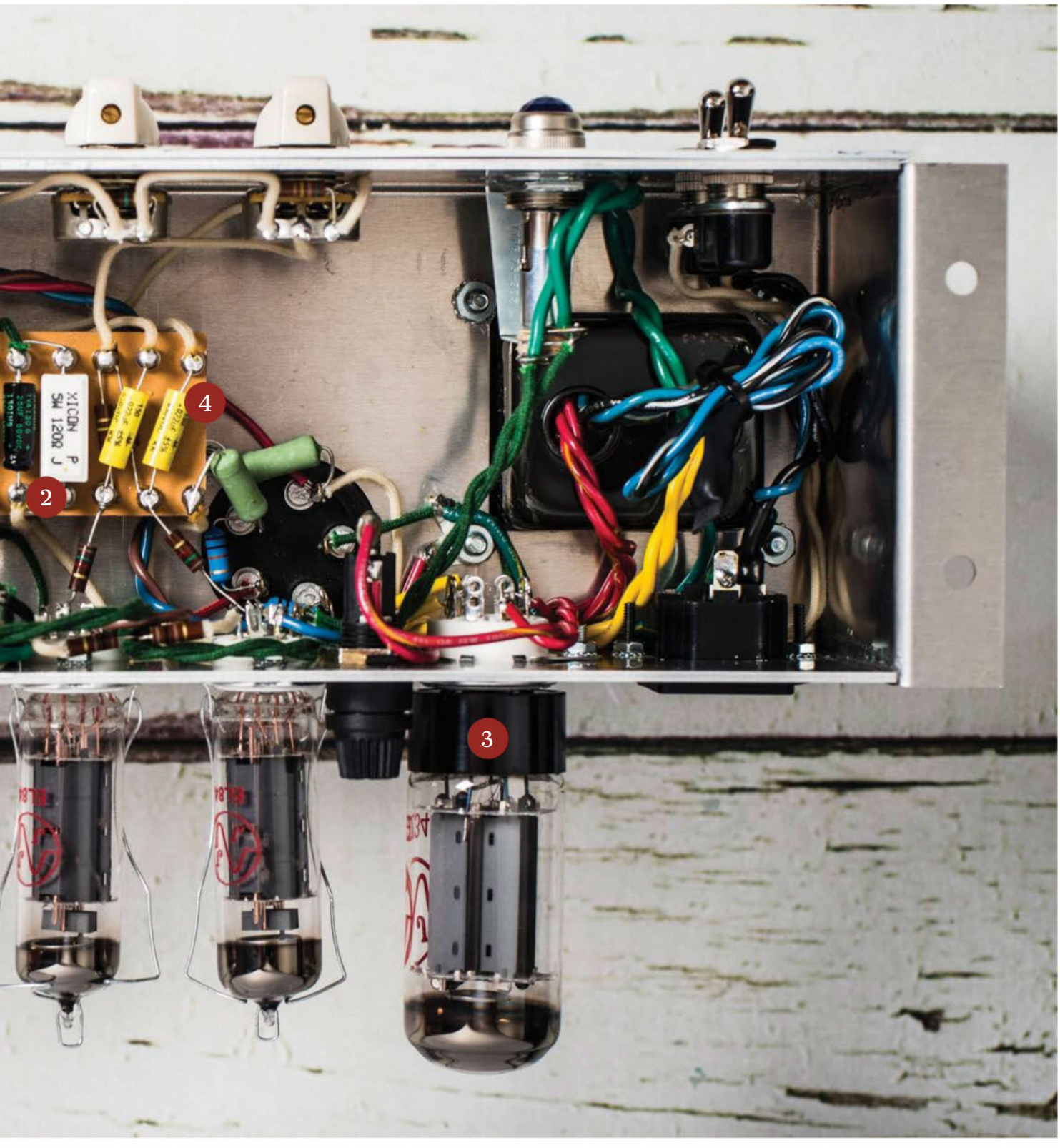


4 Tin Solder
All the signal capacitors are Mallory 150M

5 Keep On Runnin'
Where high-power resistors aren't required, Swart uses carbon composite types

2 My (Bias) Generation
This 120R resistor and the capacitor wired in parallel are the cathode-bias components for the EL84s

3 Down In The Tube Station At Midnight
The amp comes with a GZ34 rectifier but you can install a 5Y3 instead to get quicker break-up and a looser feel



6 Wade In The Water
The circuit board is a phenolic type that won't absorb moisture and Swart uses turrets rather than eyelets

The controls are top-mounted, to enable front and rear access

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The Carr Skylark £1,949 is a 12-watt tweed-inspired combo with TMB tone controls and a built-in bypass-able attenuator, but no tremolo. The fixed-bias **Rift PB16 £1,249** has reverb and tremolo, with 6V6 valves

Either way, these second two modes sound clear, airy and far more 'American' than the first mode. There are hints of tweed touch response and shimmery trebles, but the MOD 84 doesn't veer into the ferocious, open-throated roar or the saggy bass confusion that characterises some 50s Fender designs. The MOD 84 is a more refined, subtle and smoother performer that's also devoid of boxiness, thanks to the generous cabinet.

If you're a rootsy sort of player, you might say that the MOD 84 comes pre-loaded with every effect worth having – reverb, tremolo and overdrive. What's special about the MOD 84 is the way the reverb and tremolo gel with the dry guitar signal. For reasons that defy explanation, you can crank both right up without them ever becoming intrusive or swamping the guitar tone.

The reverb almost vanishes when you play fast flurries of notes, then if you chop a note or a chord short, you get a lush and thick reverb tail as it makes its presence felt. Roll back the tone control and you can hear the faint 'drrrr' of the springs vibrating. This is not a bright or particularly splashy reverb, but it's the type you'll want to turn up rather than down, because it's so compelling.

Likewise, the tremolo manages to be strong without messing with the groove. It's an easygoing, rocking-chair-on-the-front-porch sort of movement, rather than a choppy pulse. Combined with the reverb, it's almost mesmeric and a sheer delight with clean fingerpicking, mellower Hendrix stuff and swampy grind alike. Since the tremolo comes after the reverb, high depth settings turn reverb tails into a sort of echo.

If you're a rootsy player, the MOD 84 comes pre-loaded with every effect worth having – reverb, tremolo and overdrive

When pushed hard with humbuckers, I started to notice a slightly raspy, gritty quality to the overdrive. Maintaining the same settings, I activated an attenuator and the rasp vanished, so I'm fairly confident it's a characteristic of the Celestion Creamback. It's not unpleasant – some players will no doubt appreciate the sound – but it's definitely something to consider when browsing Swart's speaker options, as is the Creamback's relatively tame 97dB sensitivity.

Although the MOD 84 can be made to speak with a slight British accent, its treble refinement, three dimensionality, extreme touch sensitivity and 'hi-fi' detail resolution are established Swart hallmarks. It covers all bases – from jazzy and country cleans to bluesy honk and full-on powerchords, and generates enough sustain for soloing without pedals. Considering the quality of the design and construction and the use of top-notch components, the price is very competitive by US boutique standards.

The flimsy voicing switch is the only thing preventing the MOD 84 from getting a perfect 10, because in all other respects, there are few amps out there that can match it for roots-based playing styles at any price.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Wide tone and gain range
+ Extreme clarity without excessive brightness
+ Superb touch response
+ Very high build quality
+ Beautiful and unobtrusive reverb and tremolo
+ Swap rectifier to 5Y3 for softer feel
+ Light and easy to carry

- Flimsy EQ switch

A fantastic addition to the Swart range with stellar tone and a realistic price point – but hurry up and get one before the weak pound pushes up the price

9/10

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Motion Custom Works 3G8B1 & 4G8B1

Before founding Motion Custom, Andrew Pih enjoyed a varied career in pro audio with Neve and Calrec, and was guitar tech to the high priest of shoegaze, Kevin Shields. **HUW PRICE** checks out two of his latest creations

Based in the north of England, Motion Custom Works builds handwired valve amps with interesting twists on classic circuits and custom-built solid wood cabinets. Features include turret board construction, carbon composite resistors (where appropriate), Hammond transformers and Sprague signal capacitors. All of the company's amps are built-to-order to customer specifications and, compared to many other boutique amps of this quality, the prices are relatively affordable.

3G8B1

The inspiration for the 3G8B1 came from a studio owner who requested a recording amp that could cover the clean sounds of early-60s brownface Fenders and move into tweedy overdrive when pushed hard.

The result is a cathode-biased design rated at 12 watts with two channels, two 10-inch Weber Signature Series alnico speakers and a bias-driven tremolo circuit. The cabinet is a fair bit larger than a regular 5E3-style cab, and the amp can also be ordered with a single 12-inch or 15-inch speaker. The striking covering is a fabric from Liberty, depicting a stylised map of Paris.

The 4G8B1's cream knobs look classy on the brown faceplate

In use

The overall vibe is on the mellow side, even when you plug into the brighter and louder input of the bright channel. Even so, the big cabinet and the spread of the dual 10-inch speakers combine to produce a broad and deep sound that can fill a fairly large room despite the power limitations of the cathode-biased 6V6 output stage.

Neither late-50s tweed bite nor mid-60s blackface treble sheen are on the menu with the 3G8B1. Starting out with a maple 'board Strat, things sound somewhat jazzy until the tone control reaches around halfway, and I found one o'clock to be a reasonable starting point because below that, the top strings sound a bit muted compared to the wound strings. Around the three-quarter mark, the top end opens out quite suddenly, and it's accompanied by a slight increase in level and gain.

The volume controls are labelled in fractions, and both channels stay silent until just below the quarter mark. The progression from sweet cleans to creamy gain is so smooth and gradual you can set the overdrive level exactly where you want it. The overdrive characteristic is chimey, refined and chewy through the midrange, and you can also feel the low end gradually loosening up as the volume controls move beyond halfway, especially when humbuckers are involved.

The overall vibe is on the mellow side, even when you plug into the brighter and louder input of the bright channel

Although there's a nice range of clean-to-dirty rhythm tones to be enjoyed, the 3G8B1 is no screamer. The gain and sustain needed for soloing without stompbox assistance just isn't there. Having said that, the 3G8B1's softness makes it very much a pedal-friendly amp. Overdrives blend really well with the amp's natural tone, which sweetens and smoothes over any harsh overdrive artefacts.

Of course, you have one onboard effect to play with, too – namely the vibrato (actually tremolo). It's the 3G8B1's crowning glory because it's so versatile and playable. The ranges of the speed and intensity controls are usable throughout, and at higher speeds, the tremolo starts to hint at genuine pitch-bending vibrato.

It lends a delicate shimmer to clean tones, a swampy pulse when you add a little gain, and in overdrive mode you get a moody throb that's darkly atmospheric with a touch of additional echo or reverb.

4G8B1

Motion Custom's design criteria for this amp were "a perfectly voiced guitar tone with a fair amount of power and portability that could deliver the shimmering clean tone of the early-60s blackface amps and the midrange growl of the mighty Hiwatt DR103, but in the convenience of a combo".

A fixed-bias pair of NOS Russian military-spec 6V6s generates 20 watts. Both channels have volume, treble and bass controls, and the vibrato channel has speed and depth for the bias tremolo.

The normal channel is recommended for the single-coil user, and the bright channel will suit humbuckers and higher-output single coils such as P-90s. Our review amp was built very nicely and came with a vintage JBL D120F speaker installed. The stock speaker is a Jensen P12Q, but customers can choose their own. >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

3G8B1

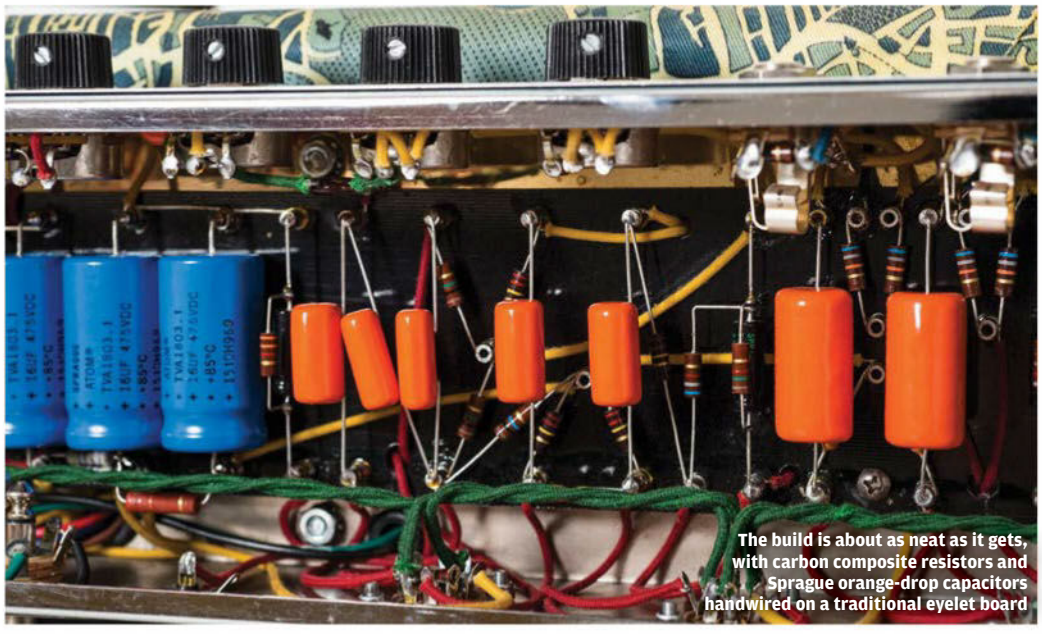
You will be hard pressed to find alternatives with similar build quality at this price, but check out the **Carr Skylark £1,999** and the **Magnatone Studio Collection Lyric 12 £1,599**.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

4G8B1

Fender-flavoured alternatives include the **Louis Deltone £2,149**, the **Gartone Revelator £1,850**, the **Rift PT20 £1,299** or even a **Fender '65 Deluxe Reverb £1,179**.

The rear panel has sockets for a vibrato footswitch and extension cabinet connection


The build is about as neat as it gets, with carbon composite resistors and Sprague orange-drop capacitors handwired on a traditional eyelet board

The turned solid-wood footswitch, with its braided brown cable, is a real touch of class.

In use

The 4G8B1 is by far the more versatile of the pair. It's also much louder, has more sustain when it's overdriving and the frequency response has a lift across the upper-midrange and treble. With the volume, treble and bass controls set identically, it's also clear that the two channels are voiced differently.

The normal channel has more midrange girth and weightier lows. I'd also suggest the overdrive character has slightly more 'British' aggression, although the JBL speaker fudges the issue slightly. The tone controls have a wide range and it's easy to dial in thick sustaining soupiness, cocked-wah bite and crisp distortion. The bass retains a commendable tightness that's devoid of flubbiness or excessive sag.

The vibrato channel will be familiar to anybody who has played a mid-powered blackface or silverface Fender combo. Where the 4G8B1 differs is the pleasing absence of glassiness in the treble. There's ample brightness and clarity, but there's nothing spiky or excessive about it. Like the normal channel, the vibrato side can generate copious quantities of overdrive and sustain, and it cleans up from the guitar equally well. However, the vibrato channel also feels more touch sensitive and the treble shadings are more subtle and shimmery. This channel also brings out the quackiness and honk from vintage-style pickups in a way that I find enjoyable.

I can see where Motion Custom is coming from with its humbucker/single-coil suggestions, but I preferred the opposite. The normal channel does the heavy blues-rock thing really well with a Les Paul and the vibrato channel handles the SRV, country and funky side impressively with Teles and Strats. Again, the tremolo is outstanding, and it's obvious that considerable research and care has gone into this aspect of Motion Custom's designs.

The 3G8B1 is not an especially exciting amp from a rocker's perspective, but it does have some engaging sonic qualities and the noise floor is impressively low. For general playing, I would probably suggest the bright channel, but the normal channel's even and woody character is mellow without being muddy – and it's a tone that's hard to find on a lot of amps.

For a more thrilling ride, the 4G8B1's two channels combine throaty midrange breakup with mid-scooped mid-60s US tone that can be pushed hard for singing soloing tones or dialled back for sparkling cleans. This dual voicing, plus handwiring and a solid-wood cabinet, give it an edge over many blackface-inspired amps.

KEY FEATURES

MOTION CUSTOM WORKS 3G8B1

- **PRICE** £1,299
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel, handwired valve combo, made in the UK
- **POWER RATING** 12W
- **VALVES** 2x 6V6GT, 5Y3WGT, 12AY7, 2x 12AX7
- **CONTROL PANEL** 4x input jacks, volume, volume, tone speed, depth, vibrato, power
- **REAR PANEL** N/A
- **SPEAKER** 2x10" Weber Signature Series
- **DIMENSIONS** 500x260x560mm
- **WEIGHT** 17.3kg/38.1lbs
- **CONTACT** 07590 259901 www.motioncustom.co.uk

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Refined vintage tones
+ Stunning tremolo
+ Creamy overdrive
+ Top-notch wiring
+ Low noise floor

- Slightly 'polite' tone
- Stompboxes needed for soloing
- Fairly low volume

Although built for a very specific and slightly limited tonal palette, the 3G8B1 fulfils its brief with aplomb, and the tremolo sounds glorious

8/10

KEY FEATURES

MOTION CUSTOM WORKS 4G8B1

- **PRICE** £1,249
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel valve combo with tremolo, made in the UK
- **POWER RATING** 20W
- **VALVES** 2x 6V6GT, 5U4, 12AY7, 3x 12AX7
- **CONTROL PANEL** 2x inputs, volume, treble, bass, 2x inputs, volume, treble, bass, speed, intensity
- **REAR PANEL** vibrato switch socket, 2x speaker outputs, standby, power
- **SPEAKER** JBL D120F
- **DIMENSIONS** 440x230x610mm
- **WEIGHT** 20.2kg/44.5lbs

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ British and US tones combined
+ Effective equalisation
+ Outstanding tremolo
+ Giggable volume levels
+ Ample gain and sustain

- Some may miss having reverb on tap

This superlative and versatile amp covers plenty of UK- and US-flavoured boutique tones and has enough gain for soloing and sufficient volume for smaller gigs

9/10

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those who dare.
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ARTIST 20+RT
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Hamstead Soundworks Artist 20+RT MKII head

CHRIS VINNICOMBE checks out the second incarnation of an amp that's generating a desirable kind of buzz...

Regular readers may recall *G&B*'s first encounter with Hamstead Soundworks back in 2014, when Richard Purvis was wowed by the considerable charms of the company's Artist 20+RT combo, designed by former avionics and radar engineer Peter Hamstead. In the two years since, the company has grown in both reputation and stature, with Grammy-nominated English singer-songwriter James Bay amongst the Cambridgeshire-based brand's high-profile users.

After branching out into stompbox effects with the launch of the Signature Analogue Tremolo in late 2015, Hamstead refocused its attention on its amp range. The MKII version of the Artist 20 was born shortly thereafter, but as James Hamstead (Peter's son and company manager) explains, it was something of a happy accident...

"The amps are very much my dad's creations," says James. "I play a part in the cosmetics, but the engineering is very much all his. Jim Bird is our in-house guitar expert, and I'd say 75 per cent of our gear's voicing is down to him. All ideas and feedback from other guitarists also go through him. He's got very, very good ears and is able to give a very balanced opinion.

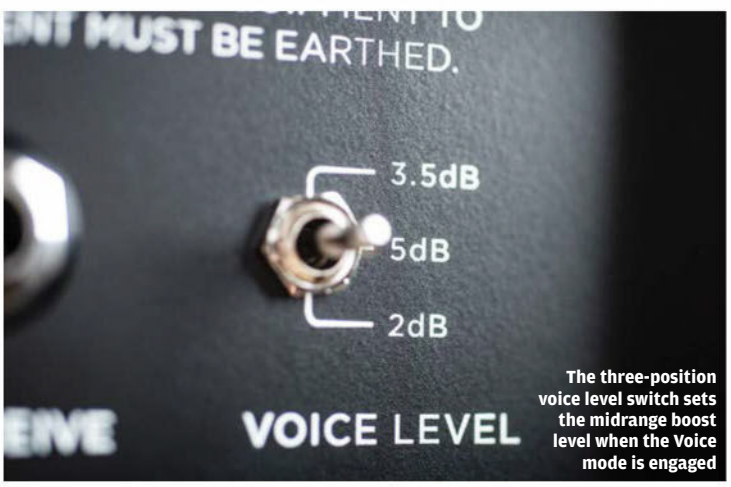
"The MKII came about by accident when Daniel Steinhardt [of TheGigRig and That Pedal Show fame – Ed] came up to us for the day. It was primarily to try out a bunch of different speakers, but we also threw a few ideas around. There had been informal chats about the MKII Artist 20 for a few weeks, but it was a long-term consideration. I think Dan asked if we could modify his Voice switch, lowering the amount of mid-boost. That's how it started.

"What's especially great about Dan is that he meets so many people with different needs and tastes – there's an awful lot of value in his feedback. Getting all three (Peter, Jim and Dan) in the same room was quite special. Ideas started bouncing around, Jim and Dan's tonal opinions meshing together, and Peter knowing exactly what he needed to do to make it happen. It all just came together so naturally. Sometimes you hear of amps being in development for years and years... all of this took less than three hours!

"Suddenly an already surprisingly versatile amp became even more versatile. So much so in our opinion, that we actually halted production less than two weeks later, and within a month the first MKII was being shipped out to some very pleasantly surprised customers!"

The MKII Artist 20 and Artist 20+RT (including reverb and tremolo) still come in exceptionally well-constructed and overbuilt 1x12 combo or head configurations (plus an optional matching 2x12 as seen here for £679 or a 1x12 for £479). Internally, the amps are as exquisite a blend of vintage and modern valve amp construction as they ever were. Given that the designer's previous field was bordering on rocket science, this should come as no surprise, but check out the circuit for yourself over the page. We'd happily fly with Hamstead Airlines.

The big news with the MKII is the addition of a bright switch, a voice level switch for the mid-boost and a clean gain switch. James talks us >

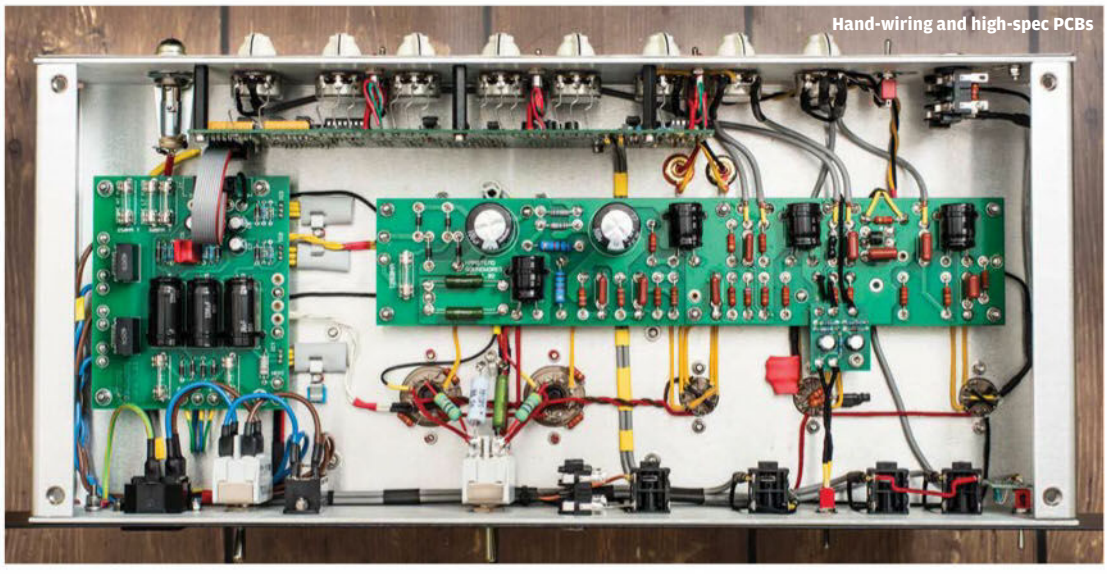


The three-position voice level switch sets the midrange boost level when the Voice mode is engaged

KEY FEATURES

Hamstead Soundworks Artist 20+RT MKII head

- **PRICE** £1,699 (including footswitch)
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel, cathode-biased class AB valve amplifier head with spring reverb and tremolo, line level series FX loop, lo & hi inputs, 8- & 16-ohm speaker outputs
- **POWER RATING** 20W (pentode) & 12W (triode)
- **VALVES** 2x EL34 power valves, 3x 12AX7 preamp
- **CONTROLS** Bright switch, gain, bass, treble, reverb depth, reverb tone, tremolo depth, tremolo speed, master volume. Switchable 'Voice' mode with 3-position upper-mid boost (5dB, 3.5dB, 2dB), switchable hi & lo clean gain modes, switchable pentode & triode modes. 4-button footswitch toggles voice, reverb, tremolo and FX loop on/off
- **DIMENSIONS** 325(h)x580(w) x270(d)mm inc feet and handle
- **WEIGHT** 15.6kg/34.4lbs
- **OPTIONS** Artist 20+RT MKII 1x12 combo (£1,899), Artist 20 MKII head (£1,499) & 1x12 combo (£1,699)
- **CONTACT** 01223 208809 **hamsteadsoundworks.com**


Hand-wiring and high-spec PCBs

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

We've heard very few valve amps of UK origin with handwired or PCB construction that do Brit-rock and chiming edge-of-breakup tones as superbly as the **Orange AD30HTC £1,049** – it's been around for a while and you'll have to bring your own effects, but this twin-channel, valve rectified EL84 head is a modern classic. **Blackstar**'s point-to-point/tag board handwired **Artisan 30H £1,049** remains fantastic value, sounds killer and is switchable between 30 and 10 watts.

through each of the additions: "The bright switch adds a touch of top-end brilliance to the tone; it's especially useful with some guitars equipped with humbucker pickups. This was already on Jim's mind, and so was on the cards. The day Dan visited, he mentioned it before we did, so that sealed the deal.

"The three-position voice level switch sets the amount of midrange boost when the Voice switch is engaged, from a subtle lift through to a full-on punch to really cut through the mix. The original Voice switch gave a 5dB boost. After some playing around with resistor values, Dan found 2dB was his personal preference. Although very subtle, we found merit in it. We took the idea further and decided upon one in the middle, 3.5dB, as well.

"The clean gain switch sets the uppermost amount of drive available from the gain control. 'Hi' is the original Artist 20 sound. We had an old Artist 20 prototype that had been modded with lower gain. We set it all up and Daniel actually preferred it. While that didn't automatically qualify it as part of a MKII plan, we added this to a pre-production model later that week. This amp belonged to a local musician, Ben Smith, who's provided us with a lot of vital input from the very beginning. After a week's road testing, he thought it was fantastic too. In addition to this, there had been a handful of calls for a little more clean headroom. Once my dad confirmed that it was a relatively simple mod that could be made switchable, it was in.

"What is important with all three of these modifications is that they are switchable. A lot of people like the amp as it is, and so we didn't want to mess with something that was already loved by many people. Fundamental change isn't our goal."

In use

Powering up with a decent Telecaster in hand and the gain control pushed, it doesn't take long to dial in a nice mix of grit and jangle as a multi-purpose rhythm tone for 90s indie-rock, punchy 60s rock 'n' roll and American power-pop. The Hamstead is no clone, but its voice has a distinctly British accent with hints of Marshall, Hiwatt and Vox, and plenty of chime, grind and bite available. The footswitchable voice control is really useful for pushing the upper-mids and giving you a more 'forward' version of that base tone. Step on it for the riff, turn it off for the verse, back on for the chorus – it doesn't feel like an extraneous effect, just a natural gear change that you can tailor to your requirements.

Between the master volume and pentode/triode switch, you can find a sweet spot for most environments, including pretty big ones, as this is a loud 20 watts with an authoritative, 3D voice thanks to the supplied, oversized open-back 2x12 fitted with Celestion G12M-65 Creambacks. If you do get the chance to run the master anywhere near wide open in pentode mode with the clean gain set hi and the gain control cranked, with single coils you'll still need an additional boost pedal for liquid sustain. Nonetheless, proceedings get pretty wild and raunchy as EL34 power stage drive and compression join the party. With humbuckers, you might not need that boost pedal – try the Artist with a PAF-style bridge humbucker and the 2dB voice setting engaged for a big, thick rock tone with willing feedback that's a lot of fun.

Sadly, not many of us can run an amp as hard as we'd like to these days, and the experience here is a little thinner and more sedate with the master wound back, but at reasonable pub stage levels there are still great drive sounds to be had. There's also more clean headroom on offer than before, and even if rolling back the gain and engaging the lo clean gain mode leaves us with a dry tone that's perhaps a little unremarkable, that's where the onboard effects come in to liven things up. Although there's a long spring reverb tray, the voicing is more like a studio 'verb than a splashy vintage Fender circuit, but proceedings can still get rather fierce. That said, the presence of a reverb tone control is a huge bonus because it allows you to soften things up nicely by rolling it back when the depth is set beyond 12 o'clock.

The tremolo is positioned after the 'verb in the circuit and it's simply sumptuous, with a speed range that's considerably wider than most vintage-style circuits, meaning you can go from a woozy, slo-mo throb to high-speed, almost Leslie-like swirls. The position of the tremolo after the 'verb in the circuit means that it modulates the reverb trails beautifully, creating a psychedelic pseudo-echo effect.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Excellent medium-gain rock, indie and power-pop sounds
+ Delicious onboard tremolo
+ Stellar build quality

- Clean tones and reverb a little uninspiring when the tremolo isn't engaged

A superbly-built Brit boutique amp that doesn't follow the herd just got even more versatile thanks to thoughtful updates

8/10

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J Rockett Tour Series pedals

They're from the same stable as the award-winning Archer... but will these compact stompboxes hit the bullseye for **RICHARD PURVIS?**

You'd be forgiven for looking at this picture and thinking of one word: Klon. Yes, the people behind J Rockett Audio Designs were involved in the manufacture of the KTR, follow-up to the legendarily mythical Klon Centaur; and yes, the Centaur-inspired J Rockett Archer is part of the same Tour Series as these four stocky little silver boxes. But while the Archer was *G&B*'s 2015 Pedal Of The Year, there's a lot more to this California-based outfit than kloning. Here, we have an ambitious modulation device, a simple overdrive, a Dumble-inspired clean boost with an SRV angle, and a fiendishly two-faced fuzzbox.

KEY FEATURES

Tranquilizer

- **PRICE** £179
- **DESCRIPTION** Vibe/phaser pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Phase/vibe blend, focus, fat, speed; bypass footswitch
- **FEATURES** True bypass; powered by 9v battery or DC adaptor (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 103mm(d) x59mm(w)x47mm(h)
- **CONTACT** Sonic Distribution 0845 500 2500 **www.rockettpedals.com**

First through the door is an analogue modulation pedal that, judging by the name and logo, should be perfect for making background music for aromatherapists. It's based on the old MXR Phase 45 but J Rockett says it can also cover vibe and Leslie sounds, the key being a 'focus' knob that controls bias. This allows you to adjust how heavily the effect throbs at the bottom of the sweep – for strongly pulsating sounds at high settings, and swishier tones lower down. Blend goes from pure phase to pitch-wobbling vibe, while 'fat' restores any phased-out low end.

Don't expect instantly likeable multi-FX fun, though. This is a nice vibe pedal, and a decent phaser, but it somehow doesn't add up to anything quite as versatile as that suggests. Focus does nearly all of its work between 11 and three o'clock, and it never really gets close to a Leslie effect... still, the sounds are all undeniably pretty.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Pleasing vintage vibe and swirly phase in one unit
+ Focus control is an innovative idea
– You might get more out of separate vibe and phaser pedals
– We're still looking for the promised Leslie sounds

Jack of all trades, master of about one and a half: this is a sweet-toned vibe/phaser, but not a rewarding pedal to play around with

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Blue Note

- **PRICE** £169
- **DESCRIPTION** Overdrive pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Volume, gain, tone, fat; bypass footswitch
- **FEATURES** True bypass; powered by 9v battery or DC adaptor (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 103mm(d) x59mm(w)x47mm(h)

If the Tour series is all about full-size tone in a compact and gig-friendly format, then the Blue Note has to be its flagship. J Rockett says this is essentially the same pedal as its Pro Series Blue Note OD, except for the omission of the 'hot' switch. It's a straightforward overdrive with controls that even a drummer would understand: volume and gain, and a two-way EQ section labelled tone and fat (so, treble and bass).

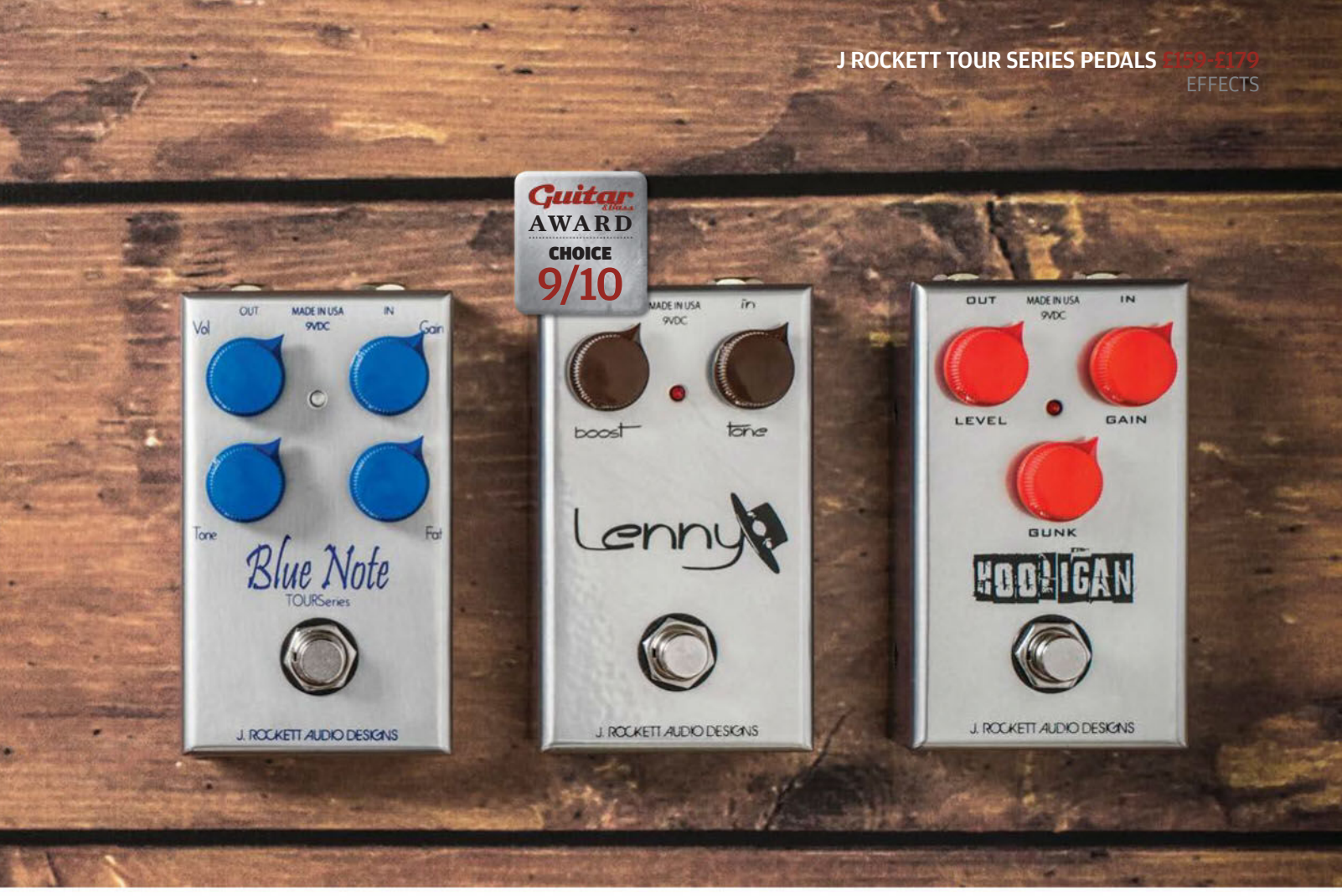
Sometimes we like drive pedals with lots of character; sometimes we rave about tonal transparency. The Blue Note is in the latter camp: the tone controls let you crisp up the top or fill out the bottom as required, but the heart of your guitar's clean tone is miraculously untouched. The breakup is sweet and amp-like, only getting seriously rocky when you turn the gain all the way up to full – you could quite reasonably describe this as a mild crunch channel in a box. That mids-pushing hot switch would've been handy, though...

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Sounds uncannily like your clean sound, but with added hair
+ Nicely judged tone controls
+ At home in a wide range of genres
– Low-to-medium gain only

This is about as close to totally uncoloured overdrive as you're ever going to get in a stompbox... which may or may not be your idea of perfection

8/10



KEY FEATURES

Lenny

- **PRICE** £159
- **DESCRIPTION** Boost pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Boost, tone; bypass footswitch
- **FEATURES** True bypass; powered by 9v battery or DC adaptor (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 103mm(d) x59mm(w)x47mm(h)

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Which did you recognise first – the song title or the hat? This two-knob boost is an attempt to recreate the silky clean tones of the Dumble Steel String Singer amp used by Stevie Ray Vaughan on his debut *Texas Flood* – and in particular, the delicious instrumental track that closes it. The results you get will of course depend heavily on the amp you run it into, but the Lenny should be as happy driving an edgy preamp into overdrive as it is adding zing to a dirt-free sound.

With both controls at halfway, you get something a lot like your bypass tone, but with bags more gain and a slight midrange bump – not quite Tube Screamer territory, but noticeable. Turning down the tone has a very musical, treble-softening effect; turning it up has an even more musical presence-boosting effect that's highly addictive. You won't just want to leave this pedal on all the time – you'll want to sleep with it under your pillow.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A booster you never want to switch off
+ Tone control can sharpen up the top end without harshness...
+ ...and tame shrill pickups without muffling

– Look elsewhere for pure, uncoloured boost

Excellent stuff, proving that two knobs can be quite enough – Stevie Ray surely would have approved of this subtle-yet-flexible tone-enhancer

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Hooligan

- **PRICE** £159
- **DESCRIPTION** Fuzz pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Level, gain, gunk; bypass footswitch
- **FEATURES** True bypass; powered by 9v battery or DC adaptor (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 103mm(d) x59mm(w)x47mm(h)

So far, so tasteful... but wait. This one's a fuzz, and it's called the Hooligan, and it's got blood-red knobs, and one of the controls is labelled 'gunk'. Oh my, are things about to take a turn for the beastly? Well, not unless you really want them to. A stripped-back version of the J Rockett WTF, this is a simple fuzz promising warmth and musicality: the gunk control adding just as much nastiness as you need.

The 'warmth and musicality' part is easy enough. At low gain settings – gunk-free for the moment – it's a smooth and blurry overdrive/fuzz sound, with all the transient spikes of your clean tone rounded off and wrapped in brown felt. Cranking the gain makes things thicker and juicier, but it stays sweet and civilised all the way round, until you unleash the gunk. This introduces a roughness that can be challenging to conservative ears even set quite low; set high, it sounds like Keith Richards gargling through a ring modulator.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Really nice mellow fuzz at low gain
+ Boopy sustain at high gain
+ Gunk control is a shortcut to sonic insanity

– Quite dark, with no way to freshen up the top end

A warm, ear-caressing fuzzbox that goes just a little bit lo-fi... and then, if you're in the mood to properly scare people, goes downright horrible

8/10

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Bad Cat Unleash V2

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Need more control over volume without affecting your tone? This updated Unleash is both attenuator and re-amper. **HUW PRICE** plugs in...

Like the original Unleash, the V2 is a 100-watt Class-D amplifier that's smaller than a shoebox and weighs only 2.5 kilos. Yet plug your amp's speaker connection into the V2's input and connect the speaker to its output, and you can adjust volume from bedroom to drummer-deafening levels without messing with your amp tone.

There are still three controls on the front panel – input trim and a volume control for each channel. You can pre-set two levels and footswitch between them and there's an effects loop, too.

purchase of an attenuator for level reduction, there are cheaper, quiter alternatives that arguably sound better.

Fortunately, though, the V2's raft of other features more than compensates. When used as a power amp, any fan noise becomes inconsequential and you can dial your favourite amp tone and feel at any level you might need. Playing a Champ, Deluxe or 18-watter with a loud drummer becomes perfectly feasible, with no need to push the amp further into overdrive just to get yourself heard.

Playing a Champ, Deluxe or 18-watter with a loud drummer becomes feasible, with no need to push the amp to be heard

In use

When I reviewed the first version of the Badcat Unleash, I observed: "switching the source amp to standby demonstrated that the Unleash produces virtually no noise and its cooling fan is silent". Sadly, that's no longer the case and the V2's fan produces both an airy whirr and a lower frequency rumble. It's now noisy enough to compete with the actual guitar sound, when it's attenuated to nighttime practice levels.

Comparing the V2 to an L-pad attenuator at bedroom levels, the V2 sounded a bit brighter and maybe clearer, but the L-pad had a fatter tone and a felt slightly fuller and more natural. If you're considering the

Listening very critically indeed, the V2 slightly thins out the tone, with a slight hint of extra fizziness in the upper mids. The rival Fryette Power Station's valve circuitry has more purist appeal and its reputation for sound quality is thoroughly deserved; however, the V2 scores higher in three key areas. It's small and light; it provides two level presets that can be footswitched and it has an effects loop. The speaker-phase switch is also great for when you may be using your onboard speaker with an extension cabinet powered by the V2. If they're not in phase, no problem.

Most will welcome the abandonment of Speakon connectors and the need for specialised cabling. The silent mode, headphone out and choice of input-impedance settings enhance the V2's functionality and add real value.

Despite very slight reservations about the sound quality when the V2 is used as the sole speaker source, it really comes into its own when there's a direct connection between the amp and speaker, and the V2 is run from the extension socket to drive an extension cabinet for the extra level required. In summary, it's the gigging amp that's small enough to carry inside the cab of your favourite studio amp.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The only remotely similar product we're aware of is the **Fryette Power Station £499**, a 60-watt attenuator amp powered by 6L6 valves with an effects loop and frequency-response adjustment.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Ultra-compact and lightweight
+ Very powerful amp
+ Continuously variable attenuation
+ Two preset levels
+ Impedance selection
+ Silent mode for recording and headphone use

- Slightly noisy fan
- No frequency-response adjustment
- Barely noticeable hint of fizziness with heavy overdrive
- £100 more than the previous version

An affordable boost-and-cut attenuator that's smaller, lighter and more fully featured than the competition

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Bad Cat Unleash V2

- **PRICE** £449
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel, Class-D power amp, made in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 1/10W to 100W
- **CONTROL PANEL** Input trim, individual channel volumes, overload indicator, silent-mode indicator
- **REAR PANEL** Signal input. 4/8/16-ohm selector, two speaker outputs, speaker phase switch, XLR/jack recording/headphone socket, FX-loop send and return, silent/normal switch, channel footswitch socket. IEC socket, power switch
- **DIMENSIONS** 18x13x13.5cm
- **WEIGHT** 2.5kg/5.5lbs
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350 815 **www.badcatamps.com**

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Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

ThroBak KZ-115 MXV

Few PAF-replica makers can claim to be using Gibson's *actual* 1950s machines. **HUW PRICE** asks: does it make a difference, or is it a wind up?

ThroBak believes those few original machines used to wind the coils of classic Patent Applied For humbuckers each added their own unique tonal signature, and actually bought and refurbished four of the same winding machines Gibson used in the 50s to make PAFs and P-90s. So, many ThroBak product names refer to the winding machine used in the production process, and the KZ-115 MXV set here was wound on a Geo-Stevens KZ/LP-115 'rescued' by Les Paul from the Kalamazoo factory before Gibson's move to Nashville.

This machine created 'centre-focused' coils, which are much fatter for fewer turns of wire compared to other machines, such as the Leesona. KZ/LP-115 coils are also said to have more scatter and a wider magnetic aperture. All components here are vintage-accurate: the review set was supplied with long alnico 2 magnets, but customers can opt for alnico 4 and 5 instead. You can also specify new or aged covers in nickel or gold, with vintage-correct copper-free plating.

In Use

This ThroBak set ticks pretty much all the boxes for authenticity. They're microphonic enough for knocks on the body to come straight through the amp; they'll sustain notes for aeons without high gain; turn down your volume controls and they clean up without losing clarity or treble; or adjust your touch to go from a clean shimmer to crunchy bite.

Having said that, the ThroBaks do have a slightly different tone to the PAFs I'm familiar with and the Monty's replicas I use for reference, in the upper mids and treble frequencies. Like genuine PAFs, the ThroBaks are bright pickups, and far clearer than the vast majority of humbuckers. However, I'd describe the alnico 2 tone as more direct and less complex than 4 or aged 5. So the emphasis is on frequencies closer to the fundamental, but you'll hear fewer harmonic overtones.

This translates to a very full and forward midrange, with a smooth and vocal delivery on the neck pickup. Single notes sound very rounded, and there's a well-articulated punchy attack at the front of notes. Bass notes can sound a bit soft and lacking in definition, but a woody smoothness gels notes together beautifully. Great if you appreciate the saggy softness of a Les Paul though a 5E3.

In the bridge position, the alnico 2 doesn't provide the airy jangle of real PAFs. However, I do like the wiry midrange push with its slightly nasal upper midrange and clear string separation, though neither pickup is quite bright enough to pull off the Fender-on-steroids trick some PAFs can.

The ThroBaks certainly thrive on drive. The bridge delivers a raw bark and percussive low-end thump. The treble stays sweet, too: there are fewer harmonic overtones to clutter up drive, so the tone retains its clear definition.

Overdrive accentuates the contrast between the bridge and neck; the latter gets smoother while never losing its expressiveness. Yet for PAF aficionados, it's all about the bloom, which is the generally accepted term used to describe the way PAFs have of shifting harmonics as notes are held. You hear overtones develop through the sustain to drift over the original note. It's a hallmark of the real thing – the ability to bloom sets the pretenders apart from the true replicas.

This set does indeed bloom but, given the softened treble, rather than an ethereal and almost eerie shift in the upper frequencies, you hear a more subtle bloom in the upper mids.

The KZ-115 MXVs are undoubtedly a superior set of PAF replicas. If you need pickups to sweeten and soften the edges of an amp that can veer towards harshness, the alnico 2 tone could be just what you're looking for. These will also lend pseudo-semi-solid ES-335-type qualities to the bass and treble of a Les Paul. For those who want scooped midrange bite of alnico 5 or the brighter balance of alnico 4, you'll find those on the dropdown menu when you order from ThroBak's website. On this evidence, I'd expect great things.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Very convincing PAF tone
+ Full midrange, softened treble
+ Touch-dynamic, with superb clean-up characteristics
+ Nice degree of microphony and bags of character

- Soft bass, slightly rolled off in the 'air' frequencies

All the desirable and defining PAF characteristics, with spot-on looks and the sweet influence of alnico 2 magnets

9/10

KEY FEATURES

ThroBak KZ-115 MXV

- **PRICE** $539 (per pair)
- **DESCRIPTION** PAF reproduction humbucking pickups made in the USA
- **SPECS** Butyrate bobbins, copper-free covers with vintage-correct corners, 42 AWG plain-enamel magnet wire, long alnico 2 magnets, vintage-correct braided wire
- **CONTACT** ThroBak 001 616 734 8977 **www.throbak.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

There are countless PAF replicas out there. Some of the most widely respected sets include the **Monty's PAFs £216**, **Stephens Designs PG HD/59 $650**, **Ron Ellis LRP $600**.

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Heistercamp Hunters Tor & Webbing straps

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Heistercamp has earned a reputation for making some of the best guitar straps money can buy. **GARY WALKER** puts two to the test

Handmade from premium vegetable-tanned leather by a family-run business in the heart of Devon, every Heistercamp strap comes in a choice of 28 colours, with countless customisation options and a lifetime repair guarantee. It's a bespoke service that has seen the company build a loyal following.

Ronnie Wood, Willy Mason, Pendulum, HAIM and Savages are among the best-known Heistercamp users, and Richard Hawley recently told us his Stannon Tor strap is "the most comfortable, most adaptable, most wonderful strap I've ever had in my life".

On test here we have the top-of-the-range Hunters Tor in Navy tanned leather, as worn by Royal Blood's Mike Kerr. We also have a more affordable Webbing strap, made from two-inch-wide heavy-duty black cotton, with strap ends finished in super-soft Chili-coloured leather.

Hunters Tor

The Hunters Tor comes in either three- or four-inch widths, tapering down to 1 5/8-inch at each end and is lined with leather or suede and foam padding sourced from the sports industry. It's a premium product, with an equally premium price of £99.

Hawley uses his Heistercamp strap on a Gretsch 12-string and has been hugely impressed by the way it prevents the headstock from unbalancing the guitar. While we didn't have a 12-string to hand, we tried the Hunters Tor on a range of guitars, including the huge-headstocked Fender Modern Player Starcaster and a Gretsch Players Edition Tennessee Rose. In both cases, it balanced beautifully. The luxuriously thick padding made for the most comfortable playing we've ever experienced, and after a vigorous band practice we weren't suffering from any aches or pains.

The Heistercamp website notes that "natural creasing and marking in the leather add to the character of these straps", and this is true of our example, which is a beautiful deep blue with matching stitching and the Heistercamp logo burnt into the leather – and a few of those characterful marks on the surface.

There are five buckle holes at the front of the strap and seven at the back, offering plenty of room for adjustment, and Heistercamp will tailor the length to your preference. The two zinc-alloy double-tongue buckles, plated in Antique Silver or Brass, are made beautifully, but our heart beat a little faster each time we lifted the strap over our head and the chunky buckle swung dangerously close to our precious Gretsch.

Webbing

The 100-per-cent-cotton webbing is strong and durable and the leather section is stitched immaculately. The strap-button holes are nicely formed and not too stiff. However, where the two pieces of leather have been glued together on our review strap they have begun to ease apart. It's a minor quibble, and will doubtless be covered by the repair guarantee.

The nickel-plated solid-brass buckles are strong and functional, with a less extravagant feel than those on the Hunters Tor. The strap adjusts between 38 and 60 inches in length – two inches shorter than the Hunters Tor's maximum. While that will be more than adequate for the majority of players, those who are six-foot plus with a penchant for ankle-bothering grunge playing might find it too short.

While the Hunters Tor may well be the best strap money can buy, the Webbing is a good option if you can't stretch to the full-leather options. Both will last a lifetime and are highly unlikely to let you down.

KEY FEATURES

Hunters Tor

- **PRICE** £99
- **DESCRIPTION** 3"/4"-wide soft leather strap, tapered to 1 5/8" at both ends with five front-buckle holes and seven at rear; 2x 1 5/8" Antique Brass or Antique Silver buckle pieces with double-tongue buckles and embossed leather loops; suede or leather lining and double-adjustment strap; graphite, ochre or matching colour stitching
- **COLOURS** Acorn, Black, Chili, Conker, Forest, Havana, Marine, Navy, Ochre, Pine, Wine, Old Chestnut, Lt Havana. Personalisation with up to three initials available (extra £10)
- **DIMENSIONS** Size adjustment ranges are 42"-52", 48"-58" and 52"-62"
- **CONTACT** 07815 660284 **www.heistercamp.co.uk**

Guitar VERDICT

+ A lovingly handmade strap that will last a lifetime
+ Suede lining and padding make for incredibly comfortable playing
+ Colour-matched stitching is very neat and tidy
+ Vast range of customisation options
+ Antique Silver or Brass buckles are strong, sturdy and stylish

- Can you justify spending nearly £100 on a strap?

Handmade with care and expertise, this is a beautiful product that will last as long as your guitar, maybe longer. Straps don't come better than this

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Webbing

- **PRICE** £38
- **DESCRIPTION** 2"-wide black cotton webbing strap; strap ends finished in 7.5"-long super-soft leather
- **COLOURS** Acorn, Black, Chili, Conker, Forest, Havana, Marine, Navy, Ochre, Pine, Wine, Old Chestnut, Lt Havana
- **DIMENSIONS** 38"-60"

Guitar VERDICT

+ Cotton webbing is more tough and durable than many other straps
+ Immaculate stitching
+ Loads of customisation options
+ Leather is stylish and durable

- May be hard to justify the price
- Glueing on our review strap could be better

An attractive option for guitarists who can't afford one of Heistercamp's full-leather straps. Strong, comfortable, adjustable and customisable. Very unlikely to let you down, but the price may be a bit rich for some tastes

8/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Overdrive Straps offers a range of hand-made full-leather, seatbelt and retro-fabric straps **€34-87**. **Levy's** claims to make the broadest variety of straps on the market, starting at **£5.99**

Orange Crush Bass 100, Crush Bass 50 and Crush Bass 25 combos

Following its excellent entry-level Crush guitar combos, Orange turns its attention to bass. **GARETH MORGAN** plugs in...

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Crush Bass 100

There's the **Fender Rumble 100 £250** with one 12-inch speaker, four-band EQ and distortion channel. Or how about **Ampeg**'s **Micro-CL** stack **£347**? The classic Ampeg tone in quite simply the coolest 100-watt offering out there. The **Peavey Max 110 £245** has a three-band EQ, Peavey's psycho-acoustic low-end enhancement and one 10-inch speaker

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Crush Bass 50

The **Ashdown AAA EVO 60-10T £199** is a 1x10-inch combo with three-band EQ and Apptek connectivity. **Laney**'s **RB3 £205** has the same-sized speaker in a tilt-back cab with three-band EQ and compression. Or there's the **Hartke HD50 £169** with its HyDrive 10-inch speaker, three-band EQ and limiter

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Crush Bass 25

Belcat's **25B £61** has a three-band EQ, presence control and effects loop. The **Eden EC8 £89** is a super-simple 20-watt unit with tone and enhance controls, whilst the **Warwick BC 20 £129** is similarly powered, but has a three-band EQ and comes horn-loaded

After filling the gap in its range for a loud, all-in-one bass amp with the splendid OB1-300 combo we reviewed in our March issue, and with louder gigging requirements taken care of thanks to the AD, 4 Stroke and OB1 heads, Orange has switched its focus to the opposite end of the power-requirement spectrum, effectively redesigning the whole of its entry-level bass combo range in one fell swoop.

A parametric EQ circuit inspired by the aforementioned 4 Stroke is featured across the whole range, while the larger Crush Bass 100 and 50 are equipped with interactive gain and blend controls that replicate the bi-amp style performance of the OB1 Series. It's great to see the attributes of higher-end models masterminded by Technical Director Adrian Emsley trickle down to the most affordable bass amps in the company's catalogue.

Crush Bass 100

The loudest and largest amp in the new line, and designed with gigging squarely in mind, the CB100 is a particleboard box standing 550mm high, 510mm wide and 355mm deep. It weighs 24.25kg (53lbs), which isn't bad for a traditionally appointed 100-watt analogue unit, and features side-mounted, recessed steel handles. The front vista is dominated by a black cloth grille, bearing the iconic maker's badge and 'coat of arms', which protects the custom 15-inch speaker behind. Orange tells us the speaker has better cone excursion (it moves further from its resting position) for improved bottom-end response, and chunkier magnets. The cabinet is also ported for even greater boom.

Effects loop and blend footswitch (not supplied) jack sockets are located at the back. The control panel houses a headphone jack socket that utilises Orange's CabSim circuit (which emulates speaker-cabinet response), XLR balanced out with a ground/lift switch and an audio in mini jack socket for plugging in a phone or tablet.

Clean and clear across the neck, with a feeling of underlying body and width – it's a great base sound for bass playing

The control panel bears the familiar quirky graphic representations of the controls, which include three oversized black knobs – one volume and two for Orange's overdrive feature: gain for the amount of spite and blend for how much of it you hear. Four smaller dials make up the EQ section, with bass (+/-15dB @75Hz) and treble (+/-20dB @5kHz) flanking middle (+/-15dB) and a frequency sweep that runs clockwise from 300Hz to 2.7kHz, although the control isn't labelled. Orange also includes a switchable chromatic tuner, which engages without muting your out-front sound.

In use

On plugging in and after utilising the efficient onboard tuner, the sound is clean and clear across the neck, with a definite feeling of underlying body and width – a great base sound for bass playing. Dialling in some bass EQ injects a warm thud into proceedings without blurring note detail, and increasing the treble unearths a raspy edge and biting attack without the snappy click you get from a horn. These practical variations are enlivened by the midrange section: on the clockwise side of the frequency

dial, boosting the level writes a tonal story of increased body with a darker hue and thud that's a tad mushy at the extremes, but tightens up towards centre position. Notes come into sharper focus on the clockwise side, accruing a slightly nasal quality that hints at the tell-tale 'burpy' attack. So, there are plenty of practical variations, plus you can add subtle buzz or full-on fiery distorted fare with a few simple tweaks to the blend and gain controls.

Crush Bass 50

A similarly no-nonsense cube, the CB50 is an ideal rehearsal combo in both size and output. At 485mm high, 430mm wide and 275mm deep with a weight of 14.45kg (32lbs), it's easily transportable via the top-mounted single black strap. A 12-inch custom speaker lurks below the grille, with porting this time at the back and, save for the balanced XLR out, Orange has kitted out the 50-watt model with the same features. So, you get the three-band EQ with sweepable mid and the distortion circuit with gain and blend controls, plus the super-handy chromatic tuner. There are jack sockets for input, effects loop, the blend footswitch (not supplied) and the CabSim-enabled headphone out, plus a mini jack for plugging in a CD player, MP3 device or similar.

In use

It's a very similar clean-and-clear tonal picture, albeit with a slightly tighter vibe courtesy of the smaller speaker. There's plenty of depth from boosting the bass EQ without ever getting seismic, the extra focus to the tone being perfect for lower volume levels and the smaller rooms that the 50 is designed to frequent. Faster speaker response also gets you more aggressive cut and bite when you dial in more treble, and if you combine this with a boost to the mid dial and a chunk of bass, the vista is tight, wiry and pleasingly impactful. All in all, it's a decent selection of practical, natural-sounding variations.

Crush Bass 25

Designed with high-tonal-quality home practice in mind, at 365mm high, 325mm wide, 235mm deep and 8.3kg (18lbs) in weight, the CB25 is a fraction too big for the desktop, but it will fit neatly into an unused corner. 25 watts is more than enough for small-room jamming, but Orange hasn't simply provided an amp for this purpose without putting any thought into it. No sir. There's no distortion circuit, but the eight-inch speaker's boom is aided by rear porting, plus it has exactly the same EQ, replete with programmable midrange, and a chromatic tuner. There's an aux in mini jack and CabSim-loaded headphone out jack socket, but no effects loop – we suspect that it would be surplus to requirements on an amp of this size.

Sounds

As with the 50, the CB25 emits a clean, focused tone, and while you shouldn't expect room-shaking lows, there's more than enough bass on offer to produce a well-rounded overall sound. Variations are similar to the 50, with extra cut and bite at the top end, darker snappy punch and brighter, tighter attack from the midrange. There's plenty of power on offer for this little combo's designated purpose, and you won't sound weak or synthetic – the tone it emits is fully realised. As with the other two members of the Crush bass fraternity, the emphasis is on practical sounds, and it's done really, really well.

KEY FEATURES

Crush Bass 100

- **PRICE** £369
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel analogue bass guitar combo, particleboard cabinet with one custom 15" speaker and front porting, made in China
- **CONNECTIONS** Input (with -6dB pad button), FX loop, blend footswitch (not supplied) and phones (with CabSim circuit) jack sockets, XLR balanced out with ground/lift button, aux in mini jack socket
- **CONTROLS** Gain, blend, bass, frequency, middle, treble and volume controls, integrated switchable chromatic tuner
- **DIMENSIONS** 550x510x355mm
- **WEIGHT** 24.25kg/53.46lbs
- **CONTACT** 020 8905 2828 **www.orangeamps.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Solid bottom end with plenty of warmth and detail
+ The blend feature is easy to use and more useful than you might think
+ Classic styling

- The unmarked frequency dial may prove confusing
- You don't get contemporary zing, but would you really expect to from an Orange bass amp?

An inexpensive option that anyone looking for their first gigging amp should seriously check out

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Crush Bass 50

- **PRICE** £229
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel analogue bass guitar combo, particleboard cabinet with one custom 12" speaker and rear porting, made in China
- **CONNECTIONS** Input (with -6dB pad button), FX loop, blend footswitch (not supplied) and phones (with CabSim circuit) jack sockets, aux in mini jack socket
- **CONTROLS** Gain, blend, bass, frequency, middle, treble and volume controls, integrated switchable chromatic tuner
- **DIMENSIONS** 485x430x275mm
- **WEIGHT** 14.45kg/31.85lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A solid-sounding, good-looking combo for low-volume rehearsals
+ Same useful EQ and blend features as the Crush Bass 100
+ Good range of easy-to-find practical sounds

- Some players may feel it falls between two stools

A portable, reasonably priced rehearsing combo that's really well put together. A good option if you can't afford the 100, and although not as versatile, it sounds just as good

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Crush Bass 25

- **PRICE** £149
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel analogue bass guitar combo, particleboard cabinet with one custom 8" speaker and rear porting, made in China
- **CONNECTIONS** Input (with -6dB pad button), and phones (with CabSim circuit) jack sockets, aux in mini jack socket
- **CONTROLS** Bass, frequency, middle, treble and volume controls, integrated switchable chromatic tuner
- **DIMENSIONS** 365x325x235mm
- **WEIGHT** 8.3kg/18.26lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A great combo that's the perfect size for smaller rooms
+ More bottom end than you'd expect from a 25-watt combo
+ The Orange-isms look very cool in miniature form

- Any gripes would be down to unrealistic expectations

An excellent bedroom practice combo with which to hone your chops. The Crush Bass 25 is compact enough but with a big, fully-realised sound and plenty of quality variations

9/10

Bassics BPA-1 bass preamp

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

The BPA-1 channels studio-engineering know-how to place total tonal control at the feet of the bassist. **GARETH MORGAN** finds out more

KEY FEATURES

Bassics BPA-1 bass preamp

- **PRICE** £445
- **DESCRIPTION** Designated bass-guitar preamp with two inputs (independent gain control for input 2) in a 6mm extruded aluminium chassis. Made in UK
- **CONNECTIONS** Input 1 (with High/Normal Impedance switch); Input 2 (with trim/gain control), Output, FX Send/Tuner, FX Return, DI Pre and DI Post jack sockets, DI Pre and Post XLR socket, Ground/Lift switch
- **CONTROLS** Input (with Input 2 selector button); Low Bass Level and Frequency, Mid Bass Level and Frequency, High Bass Level and Frequency, Compressor (with Pre/Post EQ button), Output. On/off stomp switches: Mute, EQ Bypass, Low Bass, Mid Bass, Upper Bass and Compressor
- **DIMENSIONS** 74x351x117mm
- **WEIGHT** 1.98kg/4.37lbs
- **CONTACT** Synergy Distribution 0121 270 6485 **www.bassics.co.uk**

Bassics is a brand-new British company set up by Professor Malcolm Toft. Some of you may be familiar with Toft via engineering credits on the earliest David Bowie and James Taylor albums, to name a few. Toft also designed the first 24-track console (at Trident Studios, London, 1971) and a host of professional audio equipment. His first foray into gear specifically for a single instrument, the BPA-1, is a UK-made bass-guitar preamp system, not just a glorified stompbox. Toft's concept is to move the controls away from their traditional top-of-the-amp-panel position to the bassist's feet. Add powered cab/power amp plus cab and away you go. You could even gig cab-free and send the BPA-1 to personal in-ear monitor and PA.

It's wedge-shaped, and the blue and black chassis is made from 6mm extruded aluminium – with overall proportions equal to a row of about four medium-sized stompboxes. Three main control sections have five related stomp switches along the bottom and an additional (global) mute switch is also provided. Alongside input gain, the Input 2 button toggles between two input 'channels'. Input 1 has an impedance selector switch and Input 2 its own trim control, so you can plug in basses with massively divergent output signals and even them up. The EQ section is three Level controls, offering +/-15dB and three sweepable frequency dials covering Low Bass (45 to 250Hz), Mid Bass (150 to 800Hz) and High Bass (500Hz to 3kHz). As well as an output control, there's also a studio-quality VCA compressor, with attack/release times tailored for bass guitar with simple level control and Pre EQ button. One really cool thing is that when a section is active, its control is illuminated a different colour: the buttons are also illuminated and each section has a four-segment LED level display, so you get clear monitoring of the operational status of the BPA-1. The rear panel has an FX loop (send doubles as headphone out) and both Pre- and Post-EQ XLR Outs with Ground/Lift switch.

When a section is active, its control is illuminated a different colour, and each has a four-segment LED level display

In use

To say there's a lot of common sense on display here sounds like damning the BPA-1 with faint praise, but this isn't the case at all. In operation, lighting the dials, buttons and levels gives you instant information as to which bits you're actually using. Simples. There are six different combinations of EQ settings available dependent on the type of stage, room or the simple tonal requirements of individual songs within a set in the live environment. Sounds-wise, the myriad variations are, despite the slightly complex vibe, really easy to find; the BPA-1 is an intrinsically instinctive beast in essence. If you want serious rumble or simply solidity, reach for the Low Bass dial, and combine this with tweaks to the Mid Bass for raspy punch with serious impact and a whole lot more besides. Boosting 1kHz on the High Bass control produces a raspy, gurgling tone that you can morph into the fattest finger-funk sound by adding Low Bass. Suffice to say, there's a huge variety of high-quality tonal fare on offer.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **BBE BMAX Bass Preamp £245** is a 19-inch rack unit with three-band EQ, parametric midrange, compressor and more. Stompbox-wise, the **Radial Tonebone Bassbone V2 Bass Preamp £255** is a two-channel, three-band-EQ affair; **Gallien Krueger**'s **PLEX Bass Preamp £249** has a four-band EQ.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Instinctive, musical EQ offers a host of top-notch tonal variations
+ Superb build quality and it looks the business
+ Compression is high quality, practical and transparent
+ Stomp switches make it super easy to switch between presets; illuminated controls clearly show your user status

- Some might prefer having EQ closer to eye level
- Controls are a little exposed to knocks

An excellent, studio-quality preamp that's reasonably priced, sounds superb and offers you real options in terms of how you set up to play

9/10

SMALL BUT PERFECTLY MASSIVE

6505 PIRANHA Powerful and portable, the **6505 Piranha** harnesses the unmistakable character of the iconic 6505 series in a convenient, miniscule package capable of a mighty **20 Watts** (4 Ohms). No frills – just the **raw gain** and authority of the familiar Crunch and Lead channels with simple Pre-Gain and Post-Gain controls. A single knob EQ morphs the tone from the most **notchy thrash to throaty and boosted metal** tones. A single **12AX7 tube** is the final component in the wrath of gain provided by this little beast. The design of this low voltage tube section was paramount in getting **the soul of the 6505** into such a small and lightweight package.

20WATTS **12AX7 TUBE** **1.5KG WEIGHT** **HUGE SOUND**

INNOVATION. PEAVEY AMPLIFIED.®

TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDER GUY

G&B visits Rift Amplification to find out what it takes to hand-wire a boutique valve amplifier with a circuit tweaked to our specifications

Story **Huw Price** | Photography **Chris Vinnicombe & Huw Price**

A key part of every guitarist's ongoing tone quest is figuring out what most inspires and facilitates our best playing. While an off-the-peg amplifier is fine for many, it sometimes becomes apparent that stock, factory amps cannot give us everything we need.

We may indulge in a bit of speaker and valve swapping, and perhaps even some rudimentary electronic tweaks, but some of us reach the point where we realise that combining all the features, components and circuit topologies we need in a single amplifier means we have to commission a custom build.

Fortunately, there are several amp builders in the UK who provide a bespoke, boutique service to a very high standard, and Chris Fantana at Rift Amplification is one of the very best. We decided that a 'tweedified' Princeton Reverb-influenced circuit would be the ideal office amp for *G&B*, so we asked Chris if he would help us out.

Not only did he indulge our amp fantasies by kicking design ideas back and forth over several weeks, he actually agreed to let us into his workshop to build it ourselves – under his watchful eye, of course.

So bright and early one morning, Chris Vinnicombe and I rolled up at Rift Amplification HQ in Oxfordshire to report for duty. With more than one Chris involved, I'm going to refer to them CF and CV from here onwards...

CF didn't hang about, because building an amp like this in a single day is a tall order. So after a quick cuppa, we were put to work. CV volunteered for the mechanical stuff, on the basis that it would probably be safer for everybody in the long run. While he was bolting transformers and chokes to the chassis, fixing jack sockets, installing potentiometers and soldering diodes and grid stopper resistors to power-valve sockets, I was directed towards the soldering station and a daunting pile of components.

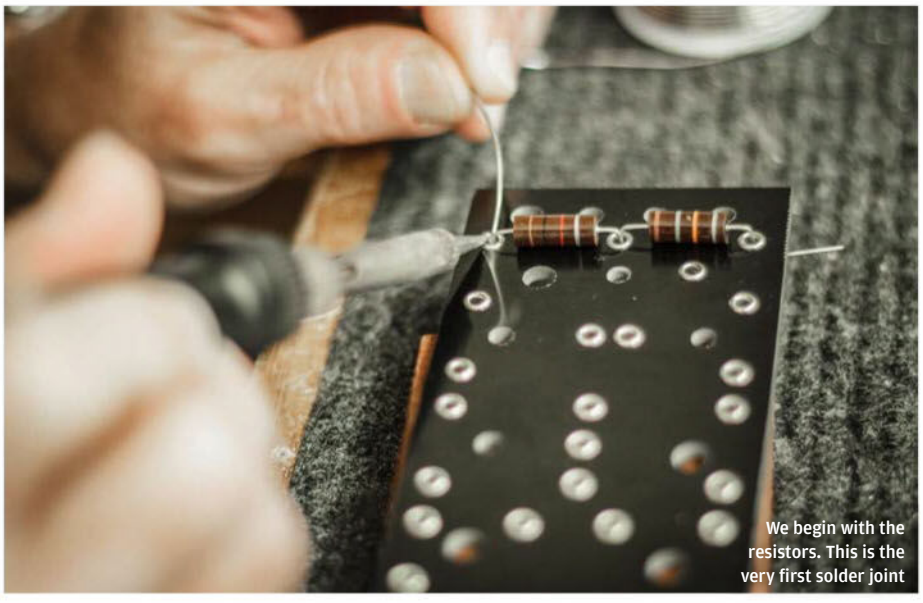
Populating the board

I was told to start with the resistors – making sure all the gold and silver tolerance bands were oriented in the same direction. It makes no difference sonically but, as CF explained, it's the sort of detail you expect to see in a bespoke amp.

Although I'm reasonably familiar with resistor colour codes, I prefer to check them all with a meter before installing. It's easy to mix up a 10K with a 100K when you're rushing and occasionally, resistor values aren't quite what the codes suggest. The lead-wire excess was pushed through the eyelets and folded over, to hold the resistors in place.

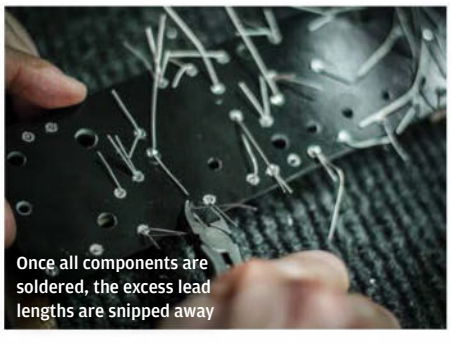
Where multiple connections were due to be made in the same eyelet, CF advised me to leave those unsoldered, but to solder the other end to hold the resistor in place.

With the resistors in situ, the next job was to install the capacitors. For this circuit, CF suggested yellow Jupiters, which sound like the yellow-and-blue capacitors used in 50s >



We begin with the resistors. This is the very first solder joint

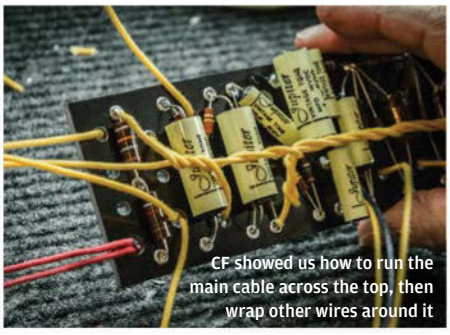
The black band on this yellow Jupiter capacitor denotes the outside foil, connected to the low-impedance side of the circuit

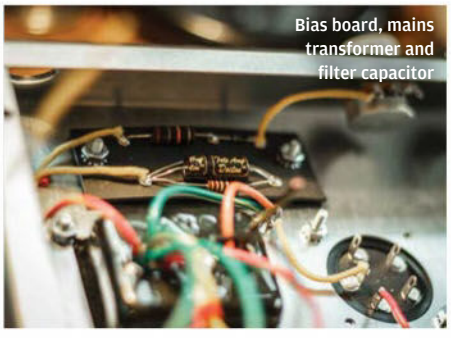


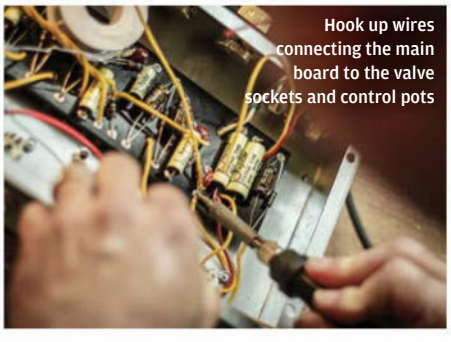
Once all components are soldered, the excess lead lengths are snipped away

There are two boards in this amp. Here's the bias board

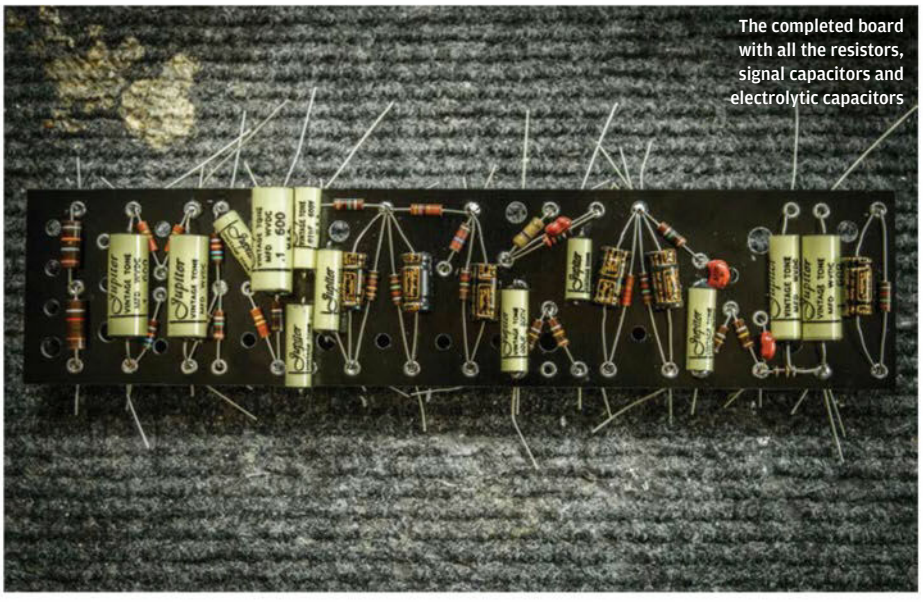
Board populating nears completion – note the diagram on the iPad

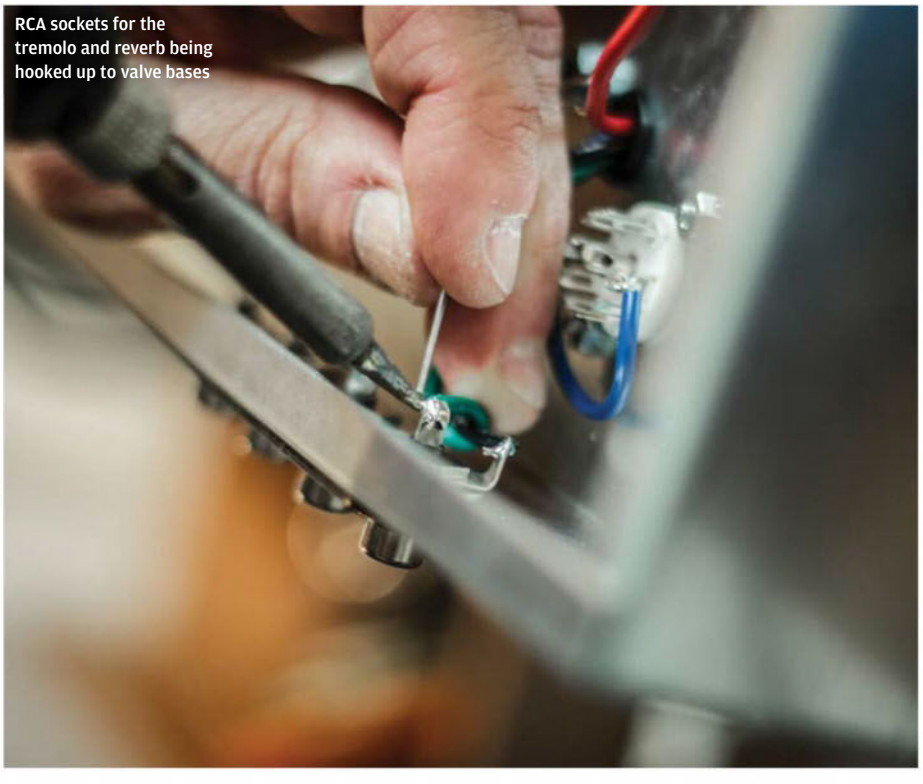

CF showed us how to run the main cable across the top, then wrap other wires around it


Bias board, mains transformer and filter capacitor


Hook up wires connecting the main board to the valve sockets and control pots

Yellow signal wires running above the main board and the green heater wires


The completed board with all the resistors, signal capacitors and electrolytic capacitors


RCA sockets for the tremolo and reverb being hooked up to valve bases

and early 60s Fender amps. A black band on one end that indicates the leadout wire corresponding with the outer foil. Although the Jupiters will work either way around, CF advised us that outer-foil orientation is important to maintain the lowest possible noise floor, because used correctly, it acts as a noise shield. The idea is always to have the lowest impedance path to ground.

Orienting electrolytic caps properly is crucial and the negative side should always correspond with ground. However, we used non-polarised electrolytics from Tube Amp Doctor, which are relatively journalist-proof. Once the electrolytics and a handful of silver mica caps had been soldered into position, I snipped all the excess lead lengths from the rear of the eyelet board.

"Building an amp like this in a single day is a tall order. After a quick cuppa, we were put to work"

Next, I had to solder hookup wires to join various points on the board together and provide connections for the power supply. The final task was to work clockwise around the board, soldering hookup wires to join the board to the valve sockets and controls. Once I was done, CF checked everything very carefully and the board was ready for installation in the chassis.

Installing the board

Rather than vulcanised fibreboard, CF uses very stiff perfboard, so it mounts on chassis standoffs and no insulating backing layer is required. Again, I worked my way around the board taking care to follow CF's instructions about keeping cable runs short and maintaining close proximity to the chassis to minimise noise.

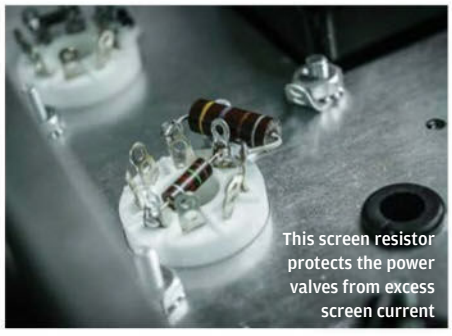
I began with V1 and worked my way along the valve sockets to the filter capacitor. CV had already mounted all the potentiometers along with various resistors and link wires, so I continued connecting the board to the pots. Two long link wires had been passed through a hole in the board prior to installation. I

When soldering components onto pot casings, first scuff up the surface

Solder resistors and capacitors directly onto the potentiometers before they go onto the chassis

The low input is a regular 'high' input and the 'high' input is even hotter

Potentiometers are mounted onto the chassis


This screen resistor protects the power valves from excess screen current

Chris trying not to burn his fingers as he solders connections to the power valve sockets

finished off by connecting those between the input resistors, V1 and the volume control.

Transformers and sockets

CV had mounted all the sockets, so I was tasked with connecting the speaker sockets to the output transformer and hooking up the footswitch sockets to the board, valve sockets and reverb transformer.

I also hooked up the mains transformer to the rectifier valve socket and the circuit board. When CV had bolted the mains transformer onto the chassis, he had placed a ground tag at each of the four corners, which made soldering the ground connections easy.

Heater and transformer wiring

Once CF had carried out a last check over, it was time to connect the heater wiring. We started by bending some of the wire 'legs' I had snipped off the bottom of the board into small 'U' shapes. These were pushed through pins four and five of the small nine-pin valve sockets and soldered in place to bridge them together. CF uses two green-cloth covered wire twisted together for the heater wiring.

Starting at V1 on the bottom right of the chassis, the wires were soldered to pins four and nine, then raised high above the sockets, bent over to carry over to the socket for V2 and bent downwards again to make the connections to pins four and nine.

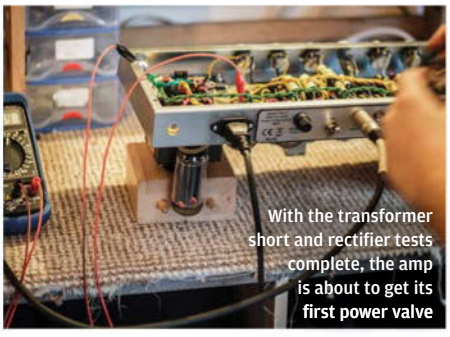
Another twisted pair of green heater wires was soldered to pins five and nine on V2's socket and carried across to V3. V4's socket was connected in the same way.

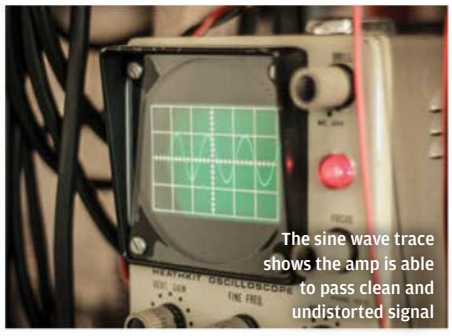
Bridging pins four and five means you can solder one wire to each pin; however, the wires were doubled up on pin nine on the V2, V3 and V4 sockets. When hooking up heater wiring like this, it's important to check that the heater connections are all in phase, so don't connect pin nine to pins four or five by mistake. Also, remember the heater voltage is not rectified and is therefore AC – which is potentially noisy. That's why the wires are twisted and positioned well away from the audio wires.

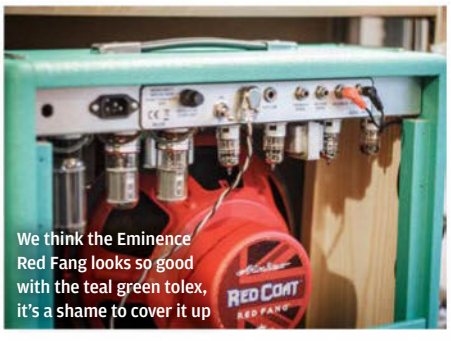
Powering up

Since this is a bona-fide Rift amplifier, CF took responsibility for hooking up the IEC socket, fuse and power switching. After one more check over, CF announced we were ready to power up the amplifier for the first time. He has a procedure that keeps things as safe as possible and can help to identify >

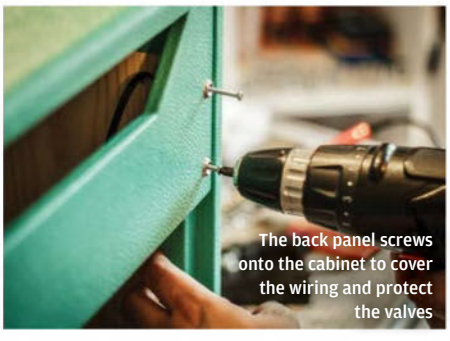
All the valves are in and the chassis has been flipped over prior to installation


With the transformer short and rectifier tests complete, the amp is about to get its first power valve

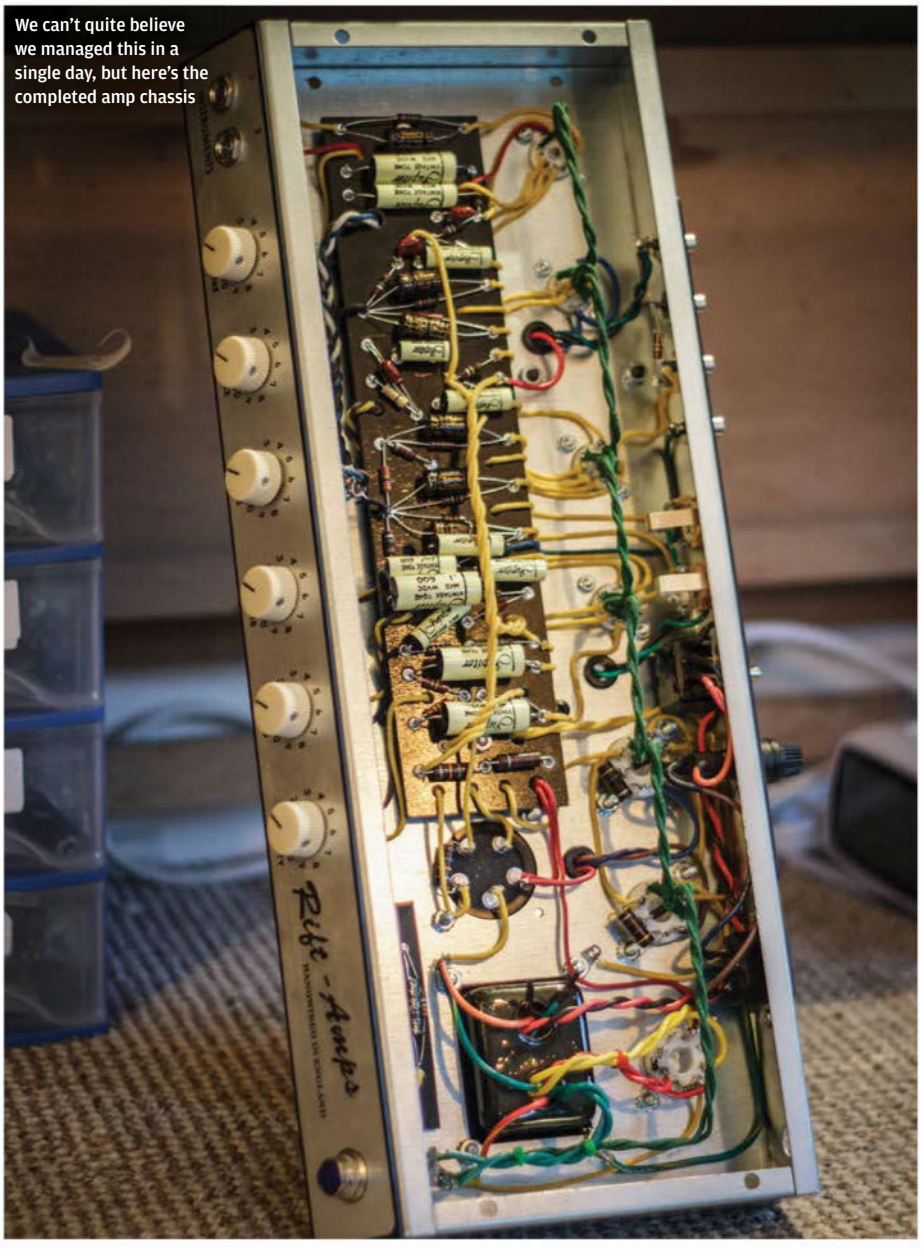

The sine wave trace shows the amp is able to pass clean and undistorted signal



We think the Eminence Red Fang looks so good with the teal green tolex, it's a shame to cover it up


The back panel screws onto the cabinet to cover the wiring and protect the valves

Huw getting his first try of the completed amp – note matching guitar



We can't quite believe we managed this in a single day, but here's the completed amp chassis

faults in the process. Firstly, he checks that all the ground points are connected. So long as they are, it's okay to start up the amp and even if there is a fault, you're unlikely to get an electric shock. CF also connects a DC voltmeter to monitor the B+ voltage and the power goes through a 100-watt lightbulb limiter with a wattmeter, so he can measure the current draw.

As a current is pulled through the filament of a lightbulb its resistance increases, so if the amp is drawing too much current, the bulb will glow even brighter, which limits the current and indicates the presence of a fault. Even so, all of CF's power-up procedure is done at reduced voltage.

Powering up is done in stages. So if CF senses anything's not right, he can switch off the power immediately. Initially, the amp is switched on with no valves installed, to check for shorts in the transformer. If there's a short, the bulb will glow very brightly. If everything's okay, the bulb will light up then dim very quickly. At this point, the amp was drawing 115mA and five watts of power, which is about right. With all the valves installed, CF would expect a properly functioning amp like this to draw closer to 90 watts.

Without ever turning off the amp, CF added the valves one at a time, monitoring the lightbulb limiter and current draw at every stage and only moving on once he was satisfied all was well. After the rectifier was installed, CF connected the amp output to a switch box that toggled between a 1000W dummy load and a test speaker. An oscilloscope was connected to the dummy load to monitor the signal.

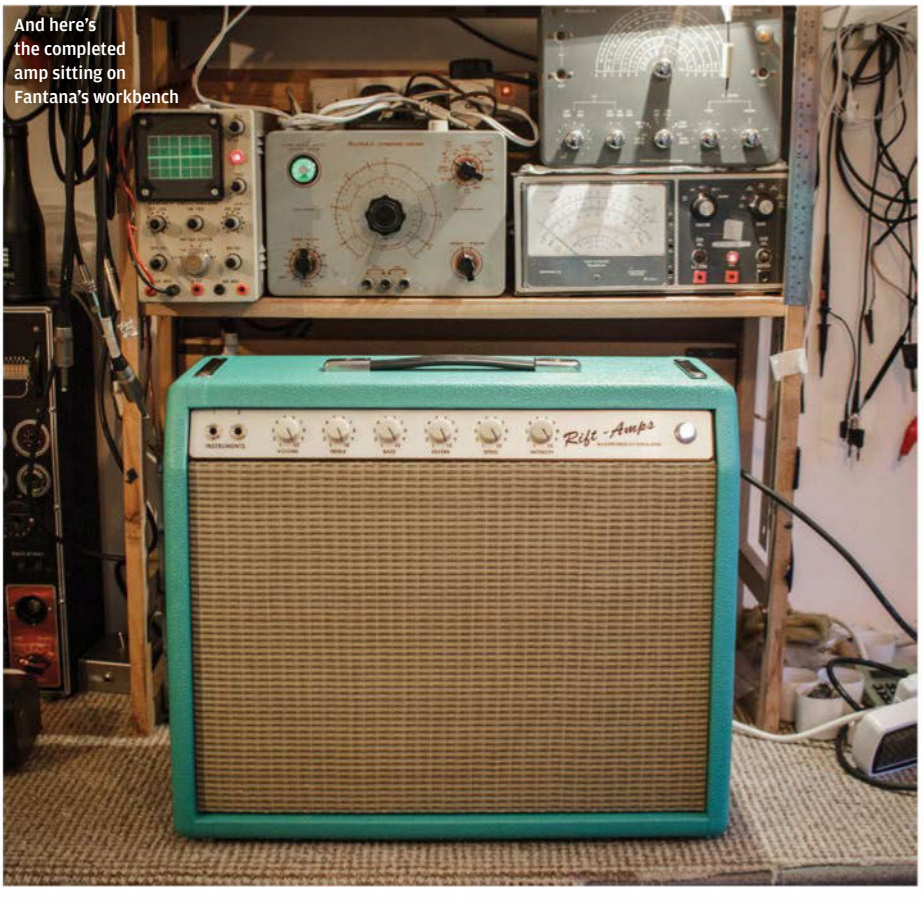
Having worked his way up to a full valve complement without any issues, CF gave the amp full mains power for the first time, along with a sine-wave input. The oscilloscope

showed the amp was passing signal and we were able to verify the controls were all working. After a quick but promising blast through the test speaker, it was finally time to mount the chassis in the cabinet, hook up the Eminence Red Fang speaker and call it a day.

Verdict

Without CF's considerable expertise, this amp would not have worked first time – I'd made a couple of resistor errors that he was sharp enough to spot – but the amp itself turned out exactly as we had hoped. We reconfigured the inputs for a normal Fender-style level plus a hot input, by using 33K grid-stopper resistors rather than 68Ks. CF also installed a push-push switch to bypass the tone controls and provide a massive hike in level and tweedy, midrange-heavy overdrive. We'd have to wonder where else you'd find such a cool Princeton Reverb-inspired amp with Teal Green tolex, a wheat grille cloth and cream knobs on a brushed aluminium faceplate? It looks almost as good as it sounds, but no doubt we'll be tweaking the tone at some point. So, a very big thank you goes out to Chris Fantana for his patient guidance, impressive teaching ability and nerves of steel as my editor and I negotiate the terms of our joint custody agreement.

Visit www.riftamps.com for more information.



And here's the completed amp sitting on Fantana's workbench

TONY BACON

Tony Bacon is an author and journalist who writes about musical instruments, musicians and music. His books include *The Ultimate Guitar Book*, *History Of The American Guitar* and *Sunburst*, and his latest is *The SG Guitar Book* (Backbeat), which tells the story of a great Gibson guitar design

THE BASS/TIME CONTINUUM

TONY BACON remembers an enlightening encounter with the virtuosic Jaco Pastorius, the bass player's bass player

Jaco Pastorius released his solo debut almost exactly 40 years ago, and it changed the way bassists thought about playing. I interviewed him back in '76, just at the time of the record's release. He was on a British tour with Weather Report, who he'd joined that year, and he wasn't feeling too good. Turns out, he'd somehow imagined I was interviewing him for a US musicians' union magazine, which was the reason he'd reluctantly agreed to chat. In fact, it was only the second interview I'd ever done, as a rookie journalist on a UK musicians' mag. I was directed to The Hotel Room Of Jaco Pastorius. He looked grumpy. He looked even grumpier when I told him I wasn't interested in his union membership.

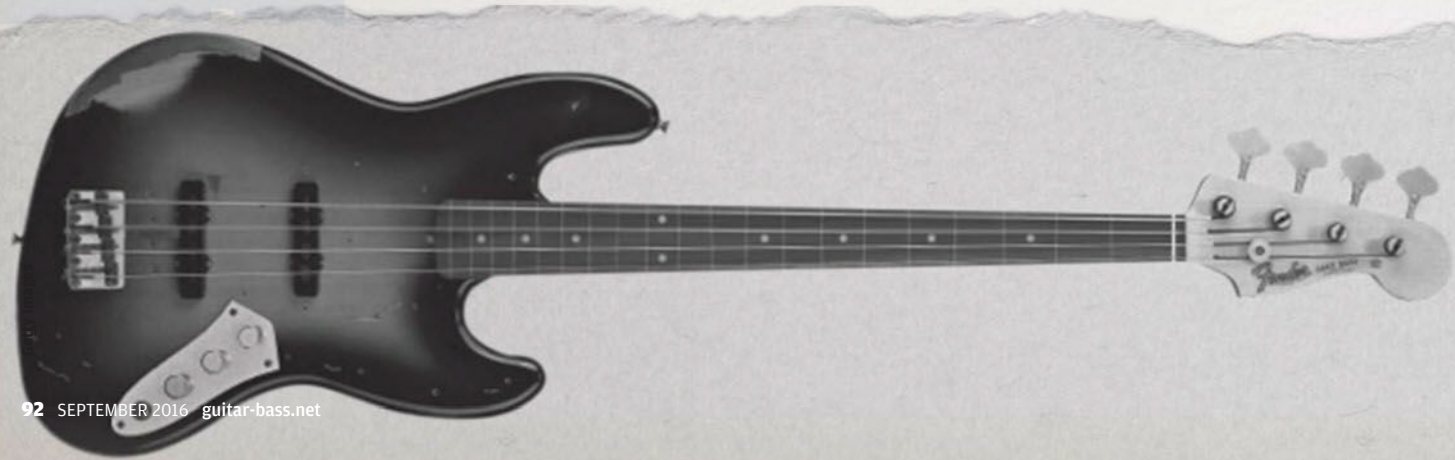
Every bass player I knew at the time had heard the Jaco record and every bass player I knew was amazed and intrigued by the remarkable sounds and techniques on display, especially the fretless style and the use of harmonics. But if one track defined the Jaco fretless sound, it was the double-tracked *Continuum*. Jaco was by no means the first electric bassist to go fretless: his achievement was to popularise the fretless bass by playing it virtuosically as a featured instrument.

Jaco wanted to have the Olympics from Montreal on the TV while we talked. He got the set working and flicked from cricket to the Test Card. I explained the state of British broadcasting, '76 style: just the three channels. He looked grumpier still. I asked about *Continuum*. "I played the whole tune twice, note for note," he explained, immediately cheerier. "People think I've got all kinds of electronic gear, but I don't use any pedals, no electronics: it's all in my hands. I wanted that tune to sound like a couple of guys singing."

I couldn't help but notice a huge silver flightcase in the corner. Could we have a look? Inside were Jaco's two Jazz Basses, and he got them out – a fretted '60 and a de-fretted '62. "I've been using both these basses about five, six years," he said with pride, playing a jolly little tune on the fretless, acoustically. "One's had the frets taken off when I bought it – it looked like someone had taken a hatchet to it, so I had to fix it up. But I've always played a fretless, and I've had a few others that I've had to take the frets out of myself." He played the fretless '62 for most of the solo album. "There are things that work better with fretted bass, like playing lots of chords, whereas with the fretless it's very difficult to play more than two-note chords in tune – I can do it, I do it a couple of times on the record, but it's a stretch." He said he liked the metal "ring" of the frets for some things, but overall, preferred the woody feel and sound of the fretless.

> *"People think I've got all kinds of electronic gear, but I don't: it's all in my hands"*
>
> JACO PASTORIUS

Of course, I couldn't know then that Jaco would leave Weather Report about five years later, that he would make some career-high contributions to Joni Mitchell's *Hejira* and *Mingus* studio albums and the live *Shadows And Light*, or that his life would be cut short in 1987, when he died in tragic circumstances at the age of just 35. As I left, I threw in a cliched question. Any advice for budding musicians, Jaco? "The biggest problem with music today is that 99 per cent of the players have no roots at all," he replied. "People learn 10 notes of music and they think they're musicians: it's a real joke. They don't feel it, they don't know it – they don't even have the potential to feel it. That's why I waited around, you know? I waited a long time. A tree never grows until it's got some roots already spreading out underneath. Then it's going to really grow."



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We always carry a great selection Fender & Squier guitars, basses & amps. Amazing selection of American Standard Series guitars & basses in stock. It's been 60 years since Fender introduced the Stratocaster. Full range of 60th Anniversary guitars now in stock. Prices start from £364

Acoustic Guitars

Our new acoustic centre in Stevenage old town is open for business. This new showroom is home to an enormous choice of exquisite acoustic instruments from Bedell, Collings, Gibson, Gretsch, Lowden, Martin, National, Taylor, Yamaha, Epiphone and many many more!!!

Two-Rock

Two-Rock are incredible sounding, hand built boutique guitar amps, made in Rohnert Park, California. New 2016 model the Two Rock Cardiff is now in stock. Come and check out this great new amp, as well as the full lineup of other Two Rock models.

Magnatone

Great range of all Magnatone amps in stock. Arriving soon & new for 2016, the **Magnatone Super 59 MK II**.

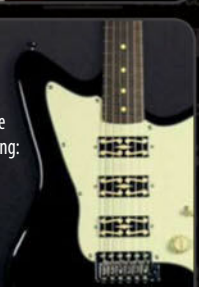
BadCat

Full range of Bad Cat amps in stock, including the brand new for 2016 Player Series. Prices start at only £649

fano guitars

The only place in the UK to see Fano guitars. New Fano Standard models now arriving. You could say the Fano Standard series is Fano's "greatest hits" collection. After studying their order history of custom Alt de Facto guitar line they combined the most popular requests of features & options into a new line of ready-to-play guitars.

K-Line



Nice fresh shipment of K Line guitars now in stock, including:
San Bernadino Sonic Blue
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Vintage TIME MACHINES

1966 VOX V252 MARK VI ACOUSTIC 'TEARDROP'

The Mark VI's radical 'teardrop' outline won favour with the likes of Brian Jones. *G&B* introduces a stunning '66 example...

In the 1960s, JMI's Vox brand shifted its focus from cheap, student-level guitars to the realm of pricier professional models packed with luxurious appointments. Whereas the company's less expensive models featured 'copycat' body styles that did little more than pay tribute to the American Fenders of the era (see the single-pickup Stroller and dual-pickup Clubman for examples of these Strat-a-likes, both produced in a modest furniture factory), the professional models made use of striking designs contracted through the London Design Centre in 1962 in an effort to separate Vox from the crowd.

The first foray into the high-end market was the Phantom VI, a solidbody electric assembled in Vox's Dartford plant using parts from various sub-contractors in the UK and Italy. The Phantom VI's 'coffin' shape melded with Strat-style configuration of three single-coil pickups, winning over British Invasion bands such as The Dave Clark Five and The Hollies, as well as American outfits such as Paul Revere & the Raiders. Four-string bass and 12-string guitar versions were also produced as part of the line, priced at around double what the student models fetched.

With the success of the Phantom VI, Vox put into production another new body shape with the 1963 release of the Mark VI. This 'teardrop' guitar used the same Eko-built neck with paddle headstock and rolling vibrola tailpiece as the Phantom, swapping the rotary pickup selector for a more ergonomic three-position toggle switch. Rolling Stones guitarist Brian Jones was an early adopter of the Mark VI model, later going on to earn his own signature model, which curiously did not see commercial release in the 60s.

This guitar has aged beautifully and is in collector's grade condition

Reverb.com's shop The Music Locker, in Derby, carries a rare Vox Mark VI Acoustic model – a semi-hollow electric gem with archetypal Vox 'teardrop' body. All-original with a gorgeous Trans Red finish and mirrored pickguard and control plate, this Mark VI Acoustic was one of Vox's most expensive instruments of the time and has a more mellow, full sound than its solidbody brethren. This particular guitar has aged beautifully over the years and is in true collector's grade condition, complete with an ultra-funky, shag-lined original case to round out that 60s vibe.

VITAL STATISTICS

1966 Vox V252 Mark VI Acoustic 'teardrop'

- **PRICE** £2,195
- **YEAR** 1966
- **TYPE** Hollowbody electro-acoustic
- **BUILD** Teardrop outline in Trans Red
- **CONTACT** Visit Reverb.com/shop/themusiclocker for details
- **SEE MORE** Reverb.com/uk

Fender Deluxe
FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA

Vintage BENCH TEST

'59 FENDER JAZZMASTER

Leo Fender's attempt to corner the jazz market with the Jazzmaster found the company some unexpected fans. **HUW PRICE** examines a glorious 1959 example

Although it seems strange now, Leo Fender was shooting for the jazz market when he developed the Jazzmaster. As was sometimes the case, Leo's ideas failed to cause much of a stir among his target market, but he ended up creating something that turned out to be perfect for genres he wouldn't have considered – or were yet to be invented.

Granted, Joe Pass played a Jazzmaster on his first album, but he bought a Gibson ES-175 when he got out of rehab. The Jazzmaster was destined to become synonymous with surf, avant-garde rock and indie noiseniks.

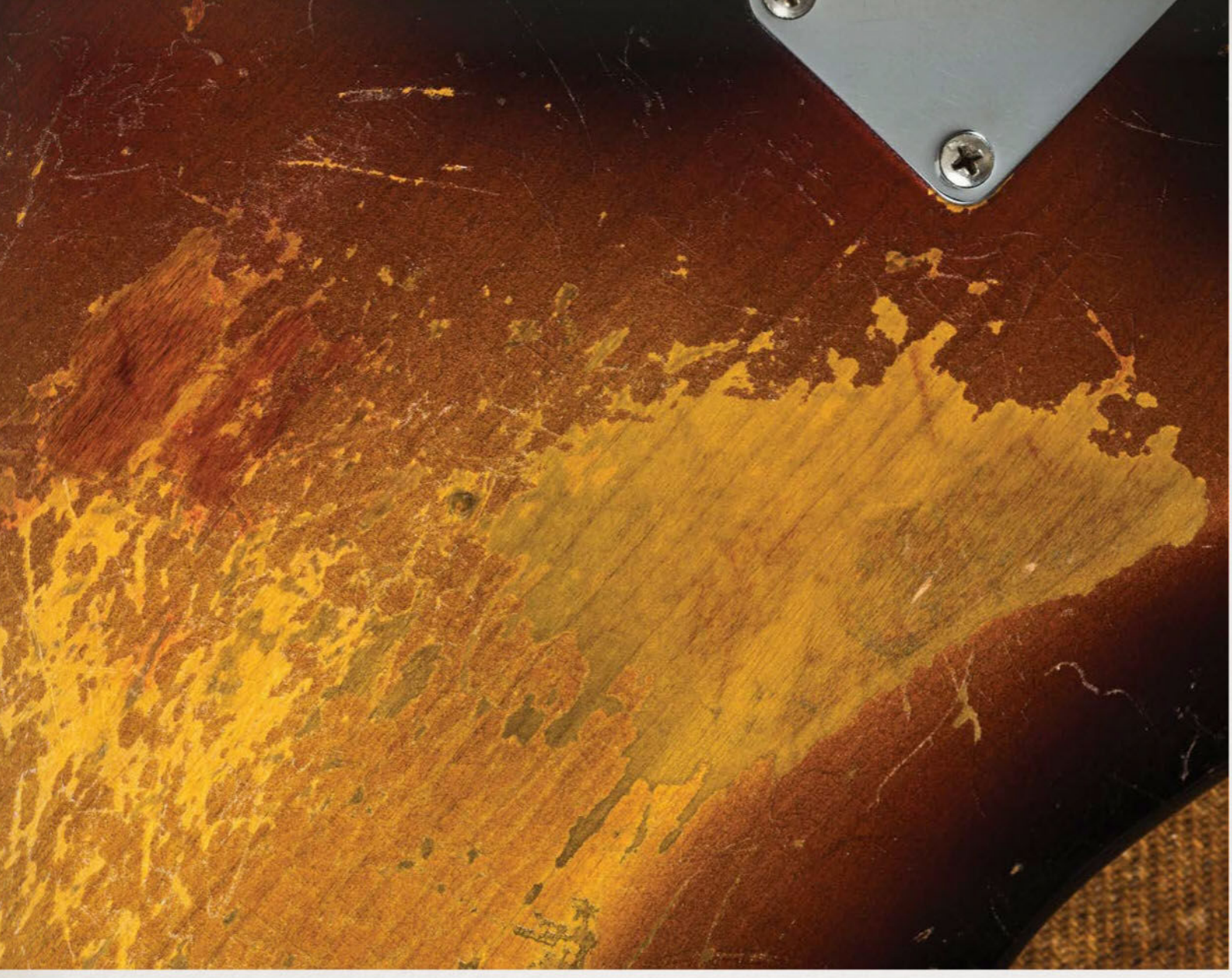
The Jazzmaster was destined to become synonymous with surf and indie noiseniks

Leo Fender must have had a soft spot for gold anodised aluminium. He used it for the pickguard on some of the very first Strat prototypes, but eventually went with a single-ply white pickguard. Fender tried the gold anodised aluminium thing again with the Precision and Mustang and the earliest production Jazzmasters. By 1960, Fender had swapped to tortoiseshell and green celluloid guards – depending on the body colour.

The problem with gold anodised aluminium is that it's much like gold guitar hardware; it may look nice and glitzy when new, but the lustre soon starts to wear off. If you share Donald Trump's aesthetic sensibilities this may bother you, but many of us prefer gold parts when they're, um... a little bit less gold.

This Jazzmaster's pickguard is a case in point. Beneath both pickups, plectrum wear has exposed natural aluminium, but I think it looks great. >

The lacquer has faded on the front of the headstock, leaving the area under the decal looking darker



KEY FEATURES

'59 Fender Jazzmaster

- **PRICE** £6,699
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar, made in USA
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple neck, 7.25" radius slab Brazilian rosewood fingerboard with 'clay' dots, 21 frets
- **HARDWARE** Vintage vibrato bridge and tailpiece with six adjustable saddles, period-correct single-line Kluson tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Two single-coil pickups, master volume and tone, three-way pickup selector switch, rhythm circuit switch with volume and tone controls
- **SCALE LENGTH** 647mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 56mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.7kg/8.1lbs
- **FINISH** Three Tone Sunburst
- **CONTACT** Cranes Music 029 2039 8215 **www.cranes.co.uk**

Above **Buckle rash is extensive**
Opposite page, top **Sanding scratches are still visible on the upper-fret dot markers**
Bottom **Fender designed this bridge for heavier-gauge strings and it works just fine with those**

Understandably, players were less into the relic thing 50 years ago, so this tendency to rub through probably caused headaches for Fender's warranty department. However, one advantage aluminium has over celluloid is that it doesn't shrink, and therefore you can still adjust the pickup heights because the covers won't be wedged tight.

It's remarkable how much late-50s sunburst finishes differ from later versions. Since the back of this guitar has such extensive buckle rash it's easy to see how Fender did it. The body was stained yellow before spraying, then the red and brown bands were added before clear coats were sprayed over the top.

The red band is very wide and the centre section has mellowed to deep amber as the top coats have darkened with age. Since there is no Fullerplast sealer, the wafer-thin lacquer has sunk into the grain of the alder and there's extensive lacquer checking with lines following the grain and cutting across the body. In summary, this is an exquisitely aged late-50s three-tone 'burst.

Although the neck shows extensive playwear, the bare wood is confined mostly to the areas closest to the edges of the slab rosewood fingerboard. Interestingly, the neck finish has darkened less than the headstock decal, so there's a nice contrast. I also found a January 1959 pencil date at the end of the neck, which is consistent with the late-58/early-59 serial number. The single-line Kluson tuners check out too, with metal bushings and the patent number stamp that puts them within a 1958-64 timeframe.

This neck has been well played and some divots have been filled expertly around the first three frets. The colour match is outstanding and the repairs are fairly hard to spot. I can find nothing to suggest the frets aren't original and, although they are fairly low, there would be no real urgency to consider a refret.

In use

Jazzmasters feel somewhat different to Strats and Teles. It's not so much the body as the position of the neck, but it's possibly a perception thing caused by the backwards-shifted treble-side waist. The neck seems longer and every time I aimed for the fifth fret on this guitar I ended up at the seventh.

Things might have been easier if I could see the side dots, but like the clay fingerboard dots, they have darkened with age and they are somewhat camouflaged. Needless to say, it didn't take too long to adjust and start enjoying this great-playing guitar.

The neck feels sublime. It's sleek and fast, but not insubstantial. Down the cowboy end, it's on the thin side of medium with an open C profile. From the third fret upwards, it thickens up quite quickly, with the open C beginning to round out only around the ninth fret. At the 12th, there's a nice clubby feel and although the 7.25-inch radius remains, the action feels low and slinky. Having said that, this >

Above **Beneath the pickup covers, years of playing has worn through the gold anodised layer of the pickguard to expose the aluminium**
Opposite page, top left **The light lacquer on the back of the neck contrasts with darker areas where the finish has worn through to the wood**
Top right, middle left and bottom right **Although the original tweed case is included, its days on the road are probably numbered, and the guitar now lives in a later black tolex Fender case**
Middle right **As you would expect, this early slab rosewood 'board cuts straight across the top of the truss-rod-adjustment screw hole. Beneath this, there's a January '59 pencil date**
Bottom left **If this were a new guitar, it could be described as a 'heavy relic'. Since it's almost 60 years old, you might say it's in remarkably good condition, with most of the battle scars confined to the back of the body**

Jazzmaster is crying out for a setup and a fresh set of strings.

Fender was going for a smoother and fatter tone with the Jazzmaster, and its pickups have the shortest and widest coils of all the classic Fender pickups. In size, shape and sound, they're closer to the P-90s most jazz guitarists were using while the Jazzmaster was in development.

Electronically, it's like two guitars in one, with a separate 'rhythm' circuit and a regular control layout with master volume and tone. The rhythm circuit involves the neck pickup only and has rotary controls for volume and tone that are tucked out of the way. Compared to the regular neck pickup tone, the rhythm circuit sounds a bit muted, but this is normal.

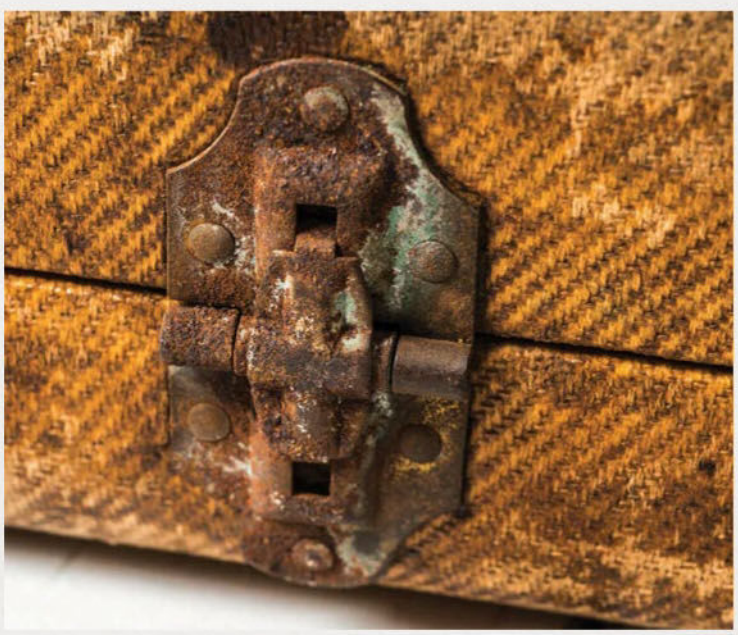
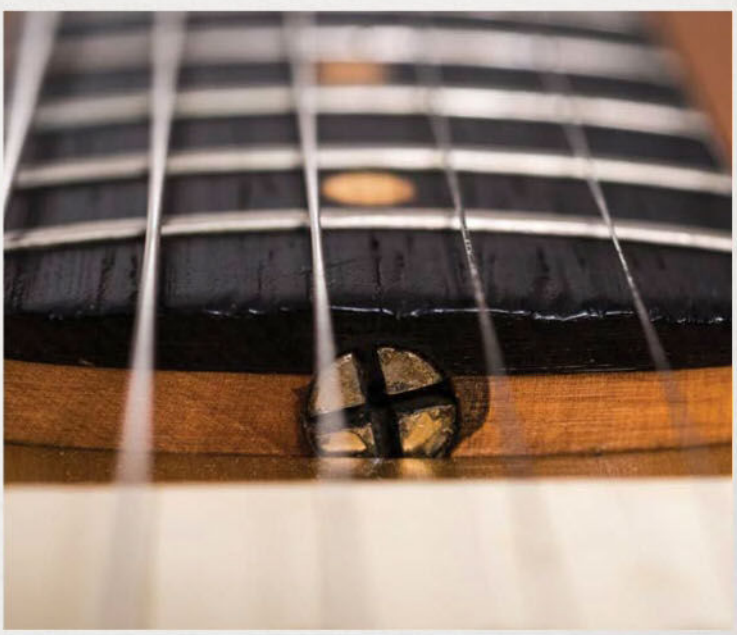
Played clean, it has a vast tonal range with pickups that can ping, sparkle and roar

Played clean, it has a vast tonal range with pickups that can ping, sparkle and roar. There is a more natural woodiness than you get with many Fenders, and the Jazzmaster's trem produces a hazier drift than the Strat's. I love the way this guitar smoothes and sweetens the harshest fuzz tones and melds seamlessly into modulation, echo and reverb for truly mesmeric effects. I also appreciate the way that it diverts me from mindless pentatonic noodling.

I couldn't quite decide if the middle setting was hum cancelling or out of phase, but I love the phasey quality. Both pickups are set some distance from the strings and it seems likely that all the sponginess has gone from the foam spacers under the pickups. As fantastic as this guitar sounds, it's almost certain that I didn't even hear the best of it.

While these Vintage Bench Test features offer an in-depth examination, the issue of authenticity is always for the vendor and customer to decide. However, there's nothing here to suggest this is anything other than a well played but cherished late-50s Fender.

The frets may be low-ish, but they're perfectly serviceable and with a new set of strings, a squirt of circuit cleaner in the switch and pots, and a dab of lube in the nut slots, you could be gigging with this guitar tonight. After just a few minutes of playing I was reminded just how much I've always enjoyed playing Jazzmasters, and I can't imagine why I have never considered buying one. If I were in the market, this Jazzmaster would tick every box.

Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

HOLDING COURT

King Crimson guitarist, solo artist and session player Jakko Jakszyk has amassed a collection of weird and wonderful guitars. **LARS MULLEN** gets a guided tour

Always a fan of early progressive rock, jazz and fusion guitar playing, Jakko Jakszyk has not only found himself in the King Crimson hot seat as vocalist and guitarist, he's also a successful solo artist, session player, producer and actor. "As a kid, I loved listening to intricate guitar parts related to progressive pop, fusion and jazz played by the likes of Allan Holdsworth and Robert Fripp," says Jakszyk.

"I saw King Crimson when I was 13 at Watford Town Hall. I remember watching Robert and thinking, 'I'll never be able to do that'. I've played in this style now for many years on numerous albums, and here I am playing lead guitar and taking lead vocals on *21st Century Schizoid Man*.

"A lot of these songs are closely arranged, almost with a classical approach. King Crimson has three drummers, all playing in different time signatures. I have heard it said that the percussion in this band is like one drummer with 12 limbs.

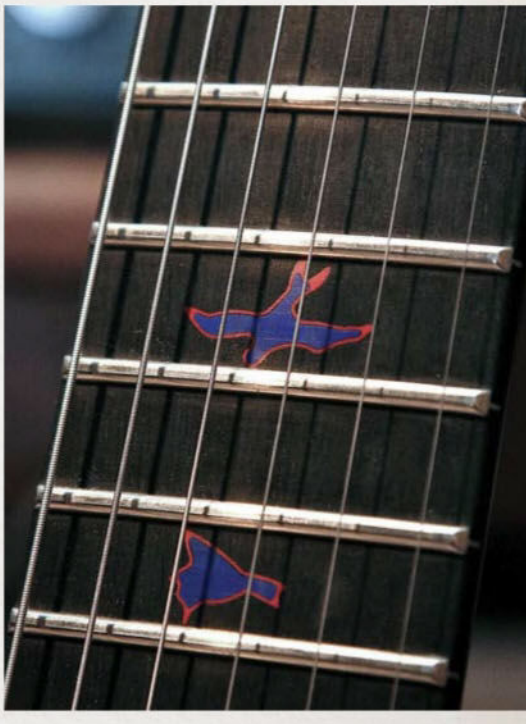
"It's incredibly well rehearsed, Robert and myself will go through new material and readdress older songs. The early material was written and played by Robert in standard tuning, but since the 80s he's employed New Standard Tuning. This makes some of the early guitar work very difficult to play in terms of ergonomics, just getting to the notes for example, which suddenly aren't as close as they used to be. I have to be on my toes, as occasionally he just asks me to play his parts.

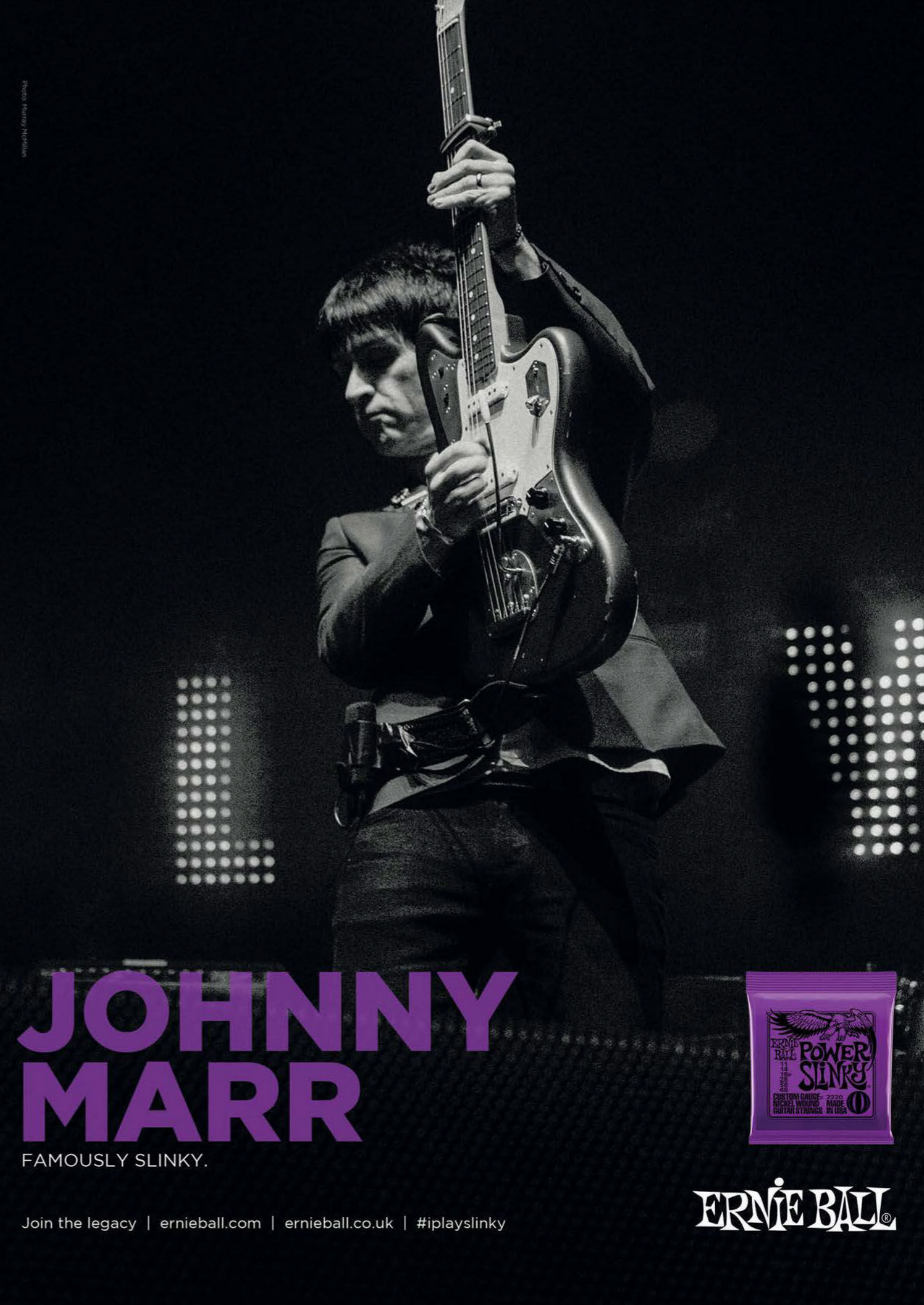
"I saw King Crimson when I was 13. Now here I am playing lead guitar on 21st Century Schizoid Man"

"When I joined King Crimson in 2013, PRS was keen to do something special, above and beyond my requests, which were a guitar with a custom neck profile and a piezo in the bridge on a P24 model. I said I'd love a guitar finished with a painting of the Schizoid Man, like on the cover of *In The Court Of The Crimson King*, designed by Barry Godber.

"I called Phil Smee, who has designed many iconic album covers, and he cleverly stretched the image so that the face was at the bulk of the body, as opposed to the original gatefold vinyl album cover, where the main part of the face was on the right-hand side. PRS came up with the blue and red bird inlays in the ebony fingerboard, which match a treat. They've put some thought into the design as well, little things like see-through controls to not distract from the image. >

Above **Jakko Jakszyk with his custom-built PRS P24**
Opposite page, top left **PRS P24 in see-through violet finish, Fire Red Burst PRS Custom 22**
Bottom left **PRS SE with custom King Crimson finish**
Top right **Detail painted by Phil Smee on the back of Jakszyk's PRS P24**
Middle right **Blue and red bird inlays on the P24**
Bottom right **PRS JA-15**

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"This is my main guitar for live work with King Crimson, it's a delight to play. A lot of the guitar passages are fast, but are made a little easier by the ebony fingerboard and smooth frets. My string gauge is quite light as well, usually 9-42 with a fairly low action. I'm a fan of the slightly lower-output pickups, overwound pickups sound a little fuzzy to my ear. I also have a PRS SE, which continues the King Crimson theme with the one-eyed guy on the front. Apart from that, it's a stock guitar, but very nice to play. I have another P24, which is my second-choice guitar, in a see-through violet finish.

"I used my Fire Red Burst PRS Custom 22 on Lenny Henry's recent album, *New Millennium Blues*. I didn't want to use the face models, as it involved several TV appearances in a documentary. I've known Lenny for years, having written a lot of incidental music for his TV programs, and I've used him on my own albums for his deep low voice. I used this guitar with the new Kemper profiling amps. They reproduce the original amp you profile in so well, it's hard to tell the difference in an A/B test."

"I've had many a cool guitar over the years that have gone the way of paying the bills"

We ask Jakszyk about the ones that have got away. "I've had many a cool guitar over the years that have gone the way of paying bills, like so many professional players," he laughs. "Some were big-bodied jazz guitars, which I needed not so long ago, so I bought a really nice PRS JA-15. As a modern, jazz-style hollow-bodied guitar, there's a lot of vintage jazzy tones happening. I use it in a band I have alongside King Crimson called Dizrhythmia, and on an album of the same name, that has an acoustic anglo-asian feel, with Danny Thompson on double bass and some superb Indian musicians.

"I used a [Danelectro] Baby Sitar on *Dizrhythmia* as well, it's a junior version of the Coral Sitar by Jerry Jones. I always loved the sitar on recordings, especially the solo in *Do It Again* by Steely Dan.

"Another I so regret selling was an Antoria copy of a Gibson ES-345. I still feel it was one of >

Top left **PRS SE Kingfisher bass (left), Vox Standard bass**
Top right **'Frankenstein' guitar made from solid mahogany (left), black Burny LP-type**
Above left **Taylor baritone acoustic (left), PRS Private Stock electro-acoustic**
Above right **Walden acoustic (left), small-bodied acoustic built by Nigel Thornbury**

Above left **Allan Holdsworth AH-10 Ibanez signature model (left), EMG-loaded Strat with Flicker vibrato unit**
Above right **80s Aria Pro II Rev Sound**

the best guitars I've had my hands on. I've owned several Gibson 345s but none of them have come close to the Antoria, maybe I'll find another one day. There are a couple of streets in Tokyo we try to aim for when we are touring there; it's said to have more guitar shops per square inch than anywhere else in the world, but I haven't seen an Antoria version there either. I feel the same about Burny guitars. I've had a few over the years; luckily, though, I still have my black LP-type, which I feel plays and sounds as good as a Gibson."

The next guitar we see is less polished, but has nostalgic significance for Jakko. "In the 70s, I had a band called 64 Spoons, in which I used a Yamaha SG with a bolt-on neck, but the bassist, who was a furniture maker, said I'd get more sustain if I had a guitar with a set neck. So we made a Frankenstein model out of a solid piece of mahogany. I missed that guitar after I sold it. One of the original members of the band tracked it down not long ago, and gave it to me as a birthday present.

"I have a gorgeous PRS Alex Lifeson Signature thinline electro-acoustic. It's a beautiful instrument"

"I was wandering around the stalls at the Cambridge Folk Festival many years ago, where people were making and selling all kinds of crafts, and I came across a guy called Nigel Thornbury selling his own hand-built acoustic guitars. I was astonished how well they played and sounded. They were made to order, so I requested this small-bodied model, hand-built for me. I have a gorgeous high-end PRS Private Stock electro-acoustic, which is also on *Dizrhythmia*.

"I also have a gorgeous PRS Alex Lifeson Signature thinline electro-acoustic, which appears on *Dizrhythmia* too. It's beautiful."

Jakszyk then harks back to his fusion roots with a 'built-for-speed' Ibanez. "I remember seeing Allan Holdsworth in '74 at the Rainbow in London when I was 16. I hadn't heard of him before, but he totally blew me away. So I went out and bought the same amp and guitar, but of course I sounded nothing like him. I saw him playing in a pub in London with a borrowed Telecaster and an amp that was lying >

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about, and he still sounded like Allan Holdsworth, then I realised it's all in his fingers and his head.

"I have an Ibanez AH-10 Signature model. With a low action and flat fingerboard, it's certainly built for speed. I used it on a lot of sessions, it sounded so good straight into an amp. I was still a teenager when I got to know Allan and I would practise at his house, well, more like him soloing over me playing rhythm. Years later, I bumped into him again when I took over from him in Level 42. Here I am, the youngster he knew from way back, now taking over his job. It was a very weird moment, but we've met several times since and he's a very sweet guy.

"I loved that early Genesis guitar sound as well, especially Mike Rutherford and Steve Hackett, that big 12-string sound. I can't remember where I bought my 80s Aria Pro II Rev Sound, but it was so much easier to play than all the other electric 12s I tried. The build quality is excellent, and it's quite a rare model now.

"I was still a teenager when I got to know Allan Holdsworth, and I would practise at his house"

"I've had several Gordon Smith guitars, which I also foolishly sold over the years. I realised how good those guitars were and found an early-80s Gemini model on eBay. It had been withdrawn, as nobody was interested. I couldn't believe it, I called the guy up and made an offer. It's a classic guitar.

"The Line 6 Variax 700 has been invaluable in the studio. I'm not that fussed about it just as a guitar, but its modelling abilities are extremely useful when I need to thrash something down pretty quick. Like I mentioned, I'm using the Kemper modelling amp live, which for me almost goes full circle back to the days when I would use amps at high volumes to try and get jazz, fusion and progressive rock sounds without any floor effects.

"We were rehearsing *Sailor's Tale* recently, from *Islands*, and Robert Fripp commented on what a great sound I had. I explained it was one of the Kemper's built-in presets, called 'Early Fripp'."

For more information on King Crimson and Jakko Jakszyk, visit dgmlive.com

Above left **Early-80s Gordon Smith Gemini**
Above right **Danelectro Baby Sitar (left), Line 6 Variax 700**

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR COLLECTION

Want to see your guitars, amps or effects featured in the pages of *Guitar & Bass*? Email the details and a few taster pics to **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com** to be considered for a future issue

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Gibson 2009 Trini Lopez

Fantastic condition. Finished in Cherry. Double Cutaway. Amazing sound. Comes with the original Gibson Hard Case.

Rickenbacker 1978 4003 Fireglo

Good condition. Made in 1978. Fantastic sound and character. Low action. Very collectable. With a Non original hard

Yamaha AEX1500

Pre-owned: Martin Taylor Model. Made in 2004. Finished in Blonde Natural. Mint condition. Comes with Hard Case.

Fender American Pure Vintage '59

Stratocaster. Finished in Sunburst. Rosewood Slab fingerboard. Three-ply mint pickguard. Alder body. Vintage accurate pickups. Includes Hard Case.

Gibson 1973 J45

Made in 1973. Fantastic condition. Built in Fishman pickup. Recent Bridge Skim and re-fret, to the highest standard. Now plays and sounds great! Comes with Hard Case.

Shaftsbury 'Barnie Kassel'

Believed to be late 60s/early 70s. Amazing condition! Finished in a bright cherry sunburst. Mixture of original and new hardware. Professionally setup.

Heritage USA 2007 H575

Made in 2007 at the old Gibson Parsons St. Factory in Kalamazoo by the Gibson craftsman who took over the factory in 1985. HRW pickups.

Rickenbacker 620/6 Mapleglo

Featuring the famous 'Cresting Wave' Maple cutaway body. Very rare the in UK. Classic Rickenbacker design and sound. Comes with a Rickenbacker Hard Case.

Gibson Memphis ES-339 Studio

2015. Finished in Gingerburst. Maple Semi-hollow body. Tradition C profile neck, 12" fingerboard radius. 57' classic humbuckers. Comes with Hard Case.

Gibson 2011 Les Paul Traditional

Finished in Black. Mahogany body with Maple cap. 12" radius 50s style neck profile. 57' classic humbuckers. Excellent condition. Comes with hard Case.

Taylor 320e Baritone SLTD

Pre-owned: Limited Edition. 27" Scale. Fantastic condition. Built in Pickup. Mahogany top. Sapele Back and Sides. With Hard Case

Gibson Chet Atkins CE

Pre-owned: Circa 1984. Solid Cutaway design. Natural Finish. 1 13/16" at nut (narrower then standard). Built in Pickup. Comes with Padded Gig Bag.

Gibson Custom 1959 Les Paul

Pre-owned: '59 Les Paul Standard Reissue. Limited Edition. Like New Condition. Creme de la creme of Les Pauls.(More info online). Comes with Hard Case.

Peerless Tonemaster Custom

Pre-owned: Solid Maple Top. FilterTron Pickups, Rosewood Fretboard, Gold Hardware, Bigsby Tremolo, Grover Tuners. Comes with Hard Case.

Fender American Vintage Hot Rod 50s Stratocaster

Pre-owned: Fiesta Red. S1 Switching. Locking Machine Head. Fantastic condition (photos online). With Hard Case.

Fender 'The Edge' Stratocaster

New for 2016! Featuring a pair of Custom Shop Fat 50s Single coil pickups (flat staggered polepieces). DiMarzio FS-1 pickup in the bridge position. With Hard Case.

Suhr Classic T Pro

Pre-owned: Rosewood Fretboard. Lola Neck pickup. Locking Machine Heads. Fantastic condition. Comes with Hard Case.

Gibson J-185 Acoustic

Finished in Tobacco Sunburst. Great condition, slight lacquer checking (see photos online). Comes with Hard Case.

National Triolian Steel Resonator

Great Condition. Stunning finish. Fantastic Tone! Thin Gauge steel, flat cut f holes. Hand Painted! Original Hard Case.

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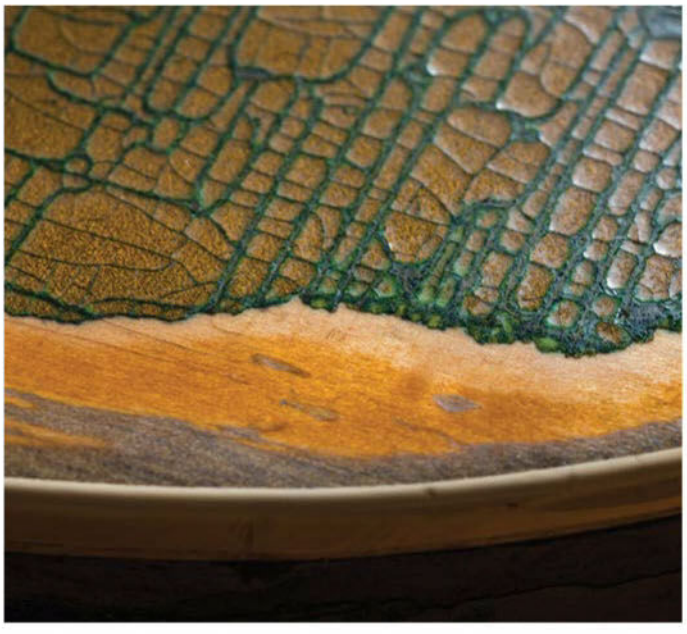
All about... Nitrocellulose

When Edmund Flaherty invented nitrocellulose lacquer in 1921, he could've had no idea how big a role it would play in the guitar industry. *G&B* explains...

Henry Ford once remarked that customers could order a Model T in any colour they wanted, so long as it was black. The reason was that 'Japan Black' lacquer was one of the few widely available metal coatings available at the time, and its fast-drying characteristics were indispensible on Ford's assembly line.

That changed with the development of nitrocellulose lacquer in the early 1920s. The new lacquer dried even faster, and it could be applied using spray guns. Best of all, an infinite colour palette was opened up. Nitrocellulose was adopted quickly by the car industry and remained the finish of choice through to the late-1950s.

Furniture and musical instrument manufacturers also switched to nitrocellulose lacquer, and mostly it was referred to simply as 'lacquer'. Pretty much every collectible acoustic and electric guitar made up until the mid-1960s left the factory with a nitrocellulose lacquer finish.



Pretty much every collectible guitar made up until the mid-1960s left the factory with a nitrocellulose finish

What is it?

Cellulose is an organic compound comprised of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. Found in the cell walls of plants and algae, it's the most abundant organic polymer on earth. The human body uses cellulose as a dietary fibre, and cellulose-derived products have been used in the photography, clothing and explosives industries since the mid-19th century.

In 1862, Alexander Parkes treated cellulose with nitric acid and a solvent to create the first man-made plastic – nitrocellulose. The process is virtually identical to the way in which trinitrotoluene (aka TNT or dynamite) is produced, which is not unrelated to the authorities' keenness to limit its use in industry.

A DuPont employee called Edmund Flaherty invented nitrocellulose lacquer in 1921. Nitrocellulose is dissolved in a solvent, which may comprise naphtha, xylene, toluene, acetone, various ketones, and plasticising materials that enhance durability and flexibility. The resulting liquid can be sprayed and the extremely volatile solvent thinner evaporates almost immediately, to leave behind a layer of nitrocellulose solids.

When subsequent coats are applied, the thinners melt the surface of the previous coat, allowing the fresh coat to bond with it. In that sense, nitrocellulose lacquer is very similar to shellac, which is another natural polymer lacquer with an even longer history. However, nitrocellulose lacquer is tougher and more scratch resistant.

Nitrocellulose lacquer also takes pigments and dyes very well, and it can be sanded and polished to a mirror finish. Its enduring popularity as an instrument finish is based on its beautiful depth and lustre, its ability to protect wood without inhibiting resonance and a supposed ability to 'breathe'. It also enables you to perform drop-fill repairs to chips and polish out superficial scratches.

However, nitrocellulose lacquer dries slowly compared to modern finishes and it's far more time consuming and labour intensive to achieve high-quality results with it. In addition, the chemicals in the lacquer are hazardous to health and the environment, and – since it's highly flammable – it's dangerous to store nitrocellulose lacquer in large quantities.

Plasticisers

The word 'plasticiser' sets alarm bells ringing for nitrocellulose die-hards. After all, if nitrocellulose is meant to be more beautiful and toneful than plastic poly finishers, wouldn't putting a plasticiser in the nitro defeat the object?

This is a misunderstanding, because plasticisers are not plastic. 'Plasticity' is defined as the ability to deform irreversibly without breaking. So placticisers are solvents that evaporate slowly over several years to prevent nitrocellulose from becoming too brittle. They don't turn nitrocellulose into a 'plastic finish' because nitrocellulose is, after all, a type of plastic.

It's understandable that paint makers and guitar manufacturers wanted their finishes to look good for as long as possible. Plasticisers make nitrocellulose more durable and less prone to checking and chipping, so it's hardly surprising that their use became widespread.

Even back in the 50s and 60s, lacquer had placticisers, and it became an issue only for those who prefer their finishes to age in the vintage style, or for would-be relic'ers who couldn't get their lacquer to crack.

Formulations

"They don't make 'em like they used to" is a general-purpose truism that is often applied to nitrocellulose lacquer, and two things are certain. Firstly, all the big guitar companies in the 50s and 60s were using lacquer from various manufacturers and the formulations were slightly different. Secondly, the balance of ingredients used in modern nitrocellulose lacquer has changed substantially from what it was back in the day.

Old lacquer was seen as having certain undesirable traits. It tended to yellow up with exposure to UV light; colour pigments often faded; temperature fluctuations caused cracking (checking) and sometimes, the lacquer would start flaking off the body. Curtis Novak is a man who knows as much about vintage

finishes as he does about pickup making, and he explained some of the changes to us.

"Over the years, they have 'fixed' the inherent problems with nitrocellulose lacquer, where it no longer yellows or cracks with age. Compared to the old stuff, they might as well call it acrylic lacquer, because that is more what it represents. The first test I do when shopping for vintage nitro is have them open the lid. The vintage stuff looks like tea, modern stuff looks more like canola oil.

"Many people think that the old nitro aged over time and, yes, that is true, but it was already very dark right from the can. Generally, if it passes the visual test, it is the old stuff and will crack very easily. The new finishes are softer, which is what prevents them from chipping and checking. As for the thickness, lacquer is forever gassing off, so over time, it gets thinner and thinner. The vintage ones were once much thicker finishes."

Not all the changes were made to improve the lacquer's durability. According to George Gruhn, the Occupational Safety And Health Administration in the US "forced makers of finishes to change their formulas over the years. While the new formulas may be less toxic, in most cases they simply don't produce the same appearance or tonal results as the earlier formulations."

Former Fender senior finish specialist Jonathan Kornau reports: "The old McFadden's formula, with the exception of one maleic resin, is still available. Lots of companies still make nitrocellulose without acrylic resins. Sherwin-Williams Opex and the Mohawk lacquers are all nitro. The solvents and plasticisers are always changing due to EPA regulations; it's possible to buy the old formulas, with only the solvents having changed. When cured, they would be the same." Sadly, US-manufactured lacquer isn't available in Europe, because it's too volatile to ship internationally.

What lurks beneath?

Although the vast majority of vintage guitars had nitrocellulose lacquer finishes, many didn't. Some had finishes that were part nitro and part acrylic, nitro and polyester or even a combination of all three.

Around 1963, Fender began using a clear polyester sealer called Fullerplast. After dying the bodies yellow, they were dipped in Fullerplast, which dried rapidly to form a flat coating for nitrocellulose to be sprayed on top. This eliminated the need for grain filling and meant the expensive nitro could be sprayed thinner without sinking into the grain – so Fullerplast saved Fender time and money.

DuPont made nitrocellulose lacquer called Duco and acrylic lacquer called Lucite. Fender used both, and Olympic White, alongside all the Fender metallic finishes, was actually acrylic.

Mostly, Fender sprayed nitrocellulose clear coats over the acrylic coats, and because the clear coats yellowed and checked over the years, many people have assumed wrongly that these finishes were pure nitrocellulose. Fender also sprayed acrylic over rejected Sunburst finishes to fulfil custom-colour orders.

To complicate matters further, from possibly as early as 1956 DuPont started using acrylic binders in its nitrocellulose lacquer to prevent yellowing and colour fading, and to inhibit checking. Even more confusing is Gibson's use of the word 'poly' to describe its metallic finishes, when they were acrylic like the rest of Gibson's custom colours.

Although nitro-finished guitars are still available, the practice of spraying nitro over acrylic and poly base coats has continued. If you subscribe to the idea that a thin nitrocellulose finish is the best option for resonance and allowing the wood to 'breathe', it's worth finding out if that lacquer finish is what it purports to be before paying a premium price for it.

DIY dos and don'ts

These days, we have to make do with whatever nitrocellulose lacquer we can get, and very few of us own professional spraying equipment. Fortunately, there are several companies in the UK that supply lacquer in aerosols, and most of the classic colours are available – along with clear and tinted varieties.

You must bear in mind that spraying nitrocellulose lacquer exposes you to some really nasty toxins. Ideally, you should set up a booth with a proper extraction fan if you plan to do a lot of spraying. It is also essential to wear a breathing mask that can block out vapour as well as airborne particles. If you go to a good car paint supplier, they should be able to advise you on the most suitable mask to buy.

You will also find that spraying nitrocellulose without an extractor fan creates huge quantities of dust and isn't healthy for anybody or anything. Spraying outdoors on dry days when there is little or no wind is ideal, but opportunities are few in the UK.

Spraying guitars is an absorbing hobby, and with practice and patience you can achieve results that will rival the pros. And if you goof up the finish, you can always relic it.

BUYER'S GUIDE

For classic Fender and Gibson colours, you'll need to go to specialist suppliers, but all the colours are available. The days when you could find nitro lacquer in car-accessories shops are long gone, but you can still get clear lacquer from furniture-finish suppliers. Here's a selection.

MANCHESTER GUITAR TECH £15 PER CAN

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Chord Clinic

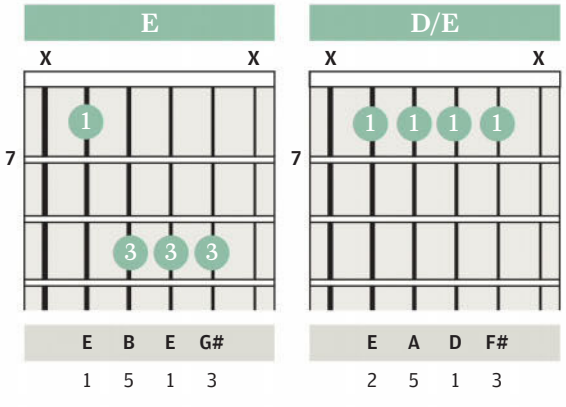
Triads are some of the simplest chords playable on a guitar, but move them around over a pedal note and things start to get really interesting. **ROD FOGG** explains...

Triads, which are three-note chords consisting of a root, third and fifth, can fall under the fingers very easily on the guitar, and are great tools for creating rhythm parts. One way to make triads sound interesting is to play them over a pedal note. We mentioned pedal notes last month – in case you didn't catch it, the idea of a pedal note originated when organists held down a long bass note using the pedal keyboard under their feet, while allowing the harmony to change up above on the keyboard, played with the hands. In all the following examples we are going to refer to the three highest notes as the triad and the bass note as the pedal note.

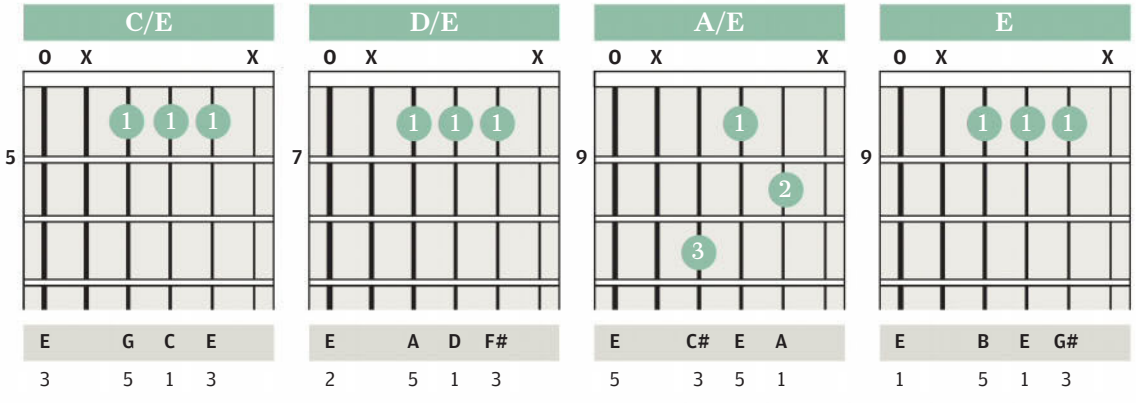
The chords in figure 1, E followed by D with E bass, can be alternated back and forth within one bar of music; try picking the bass note first and then strumming the upper three notes of the triad. Incidentally, both of these triads have the fifth of the chord as their lowest note, which makes them what we call a second inversion. Chord sequences such as these are effective because the D/E chord creates tension and the E chord provides stability or resolution. Have a listen to Martha And The Vandellas' *Dancing In The Street* for inspiration, and notice how much time it is possible to spend on this kind of simple alternating chord riff.

Figure 2 takes as its starting point the kind of rhythm part that Eddie Van Halen often came up with. Play the C and D chords with downstrokes in a rhythm of your choosing, and sound the open E pedal in any gaps in the rhythm. In the next bar, switch to the A and E triads, again keeping the open E string going as much as possible. The A triad is in first inversion, as it has the third, C sharp, in

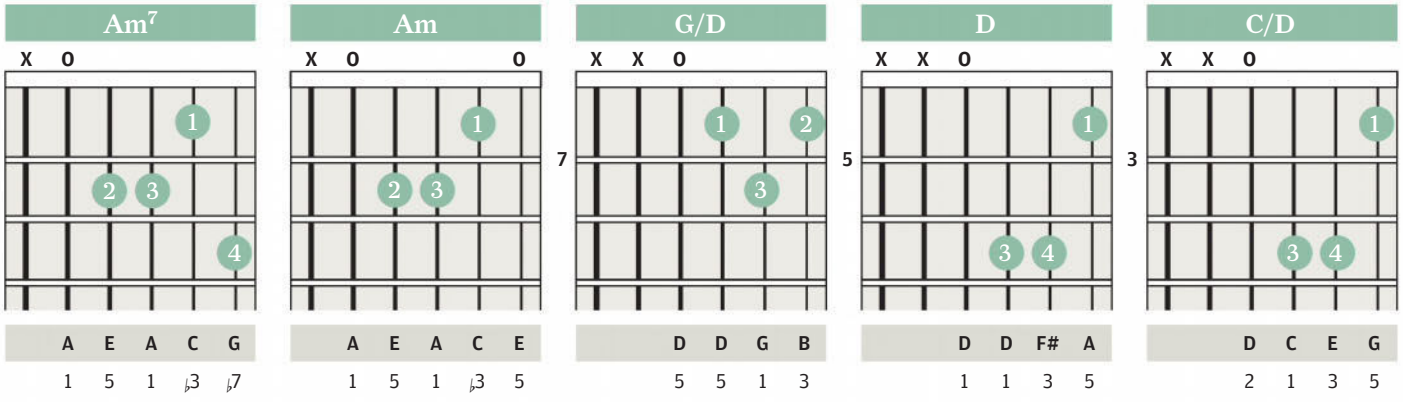
Second bass (Fig 1)



Pedal to the metal (Fig 2)



Mix it up (Fig 3)



the bass. We were inspired by *Running With The Devil*, but in that track, the bass guitar provides the pedal note – so we thought we'd see if it was possible to do something in a similar vein entirely on guitar.

A song section could mix ordinary chords in one bar with triads over pedal notes in the next. This is the approach we have taken in figure 3, where the A minor seven and A minor chords could occupy the first bar, and the second bar could consist of G/D and D. Bar three of this four-bar sequence would be the A minor chords again, and in bar four we can add in the C/D chord as well. Notice that the G chord is in second inversion, but the C and D triads are both in root position.

Check out the "and it makes me wonder" section of Led Zeppelin's *Stairway To Heaven* for an example of a song using this approach. Notice that, unlike the previous examples, this one has two tonal centres that switch between A and D.

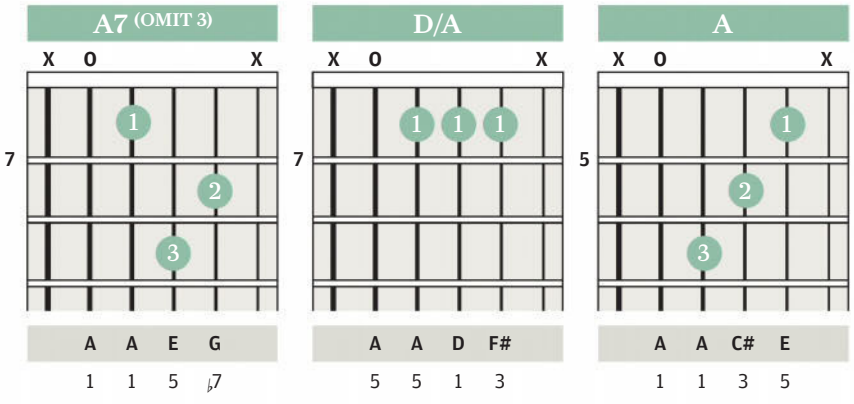
There's no reason why you can't extend a triad to include the seventh and still use pedal notes. In figure 4, the first chord hints at A7, but keeps to three notes by cunningly leaving out the third of the chord, C sharp. We put this riff in the key of A so that we could use the open A string as a pedal over which the three-note chords can move. For inspiration, have a listen to the Spencer Davis Group's *Gimme Some Lovin'* at the point where the organ comes in during the intro. That song is in the key of G, so it is not going to sound the same, but it will give you an idea of how this kind of approach can work. >

So far, we've used only major triads. Figure 5 changes that by starting off with a minor chord and doesn't stop there, going on to include an add11, a 7sus4 and a seventh. If you have a pedal note that sounds throughout a chord sequence it can be very effective if you abandon the pedal note for a brief moment – that's what is happening when the second-to-last chord, G6, appears. It creates surprise and tension, followed by satisfaction when the pedal note reappears in the last bar. You could try playing this chord sequence as a series of rising arpeggios, which makes it sound as though it may have been written 300 years ago by JS Bach.

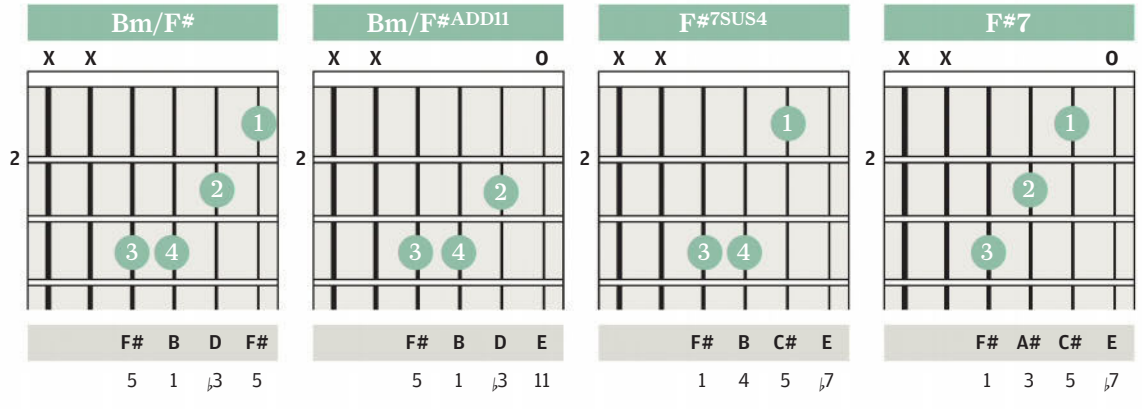
Our inspiration for this chord sequence was the intro to The Who's *Pinball Wizard*, in which the F sharp on the fourth fret of the D string is played as a persistent pedal note in virtually every bar. Our sequence is different and has been turned into an eight-bar sequence, which can be looped round and round.

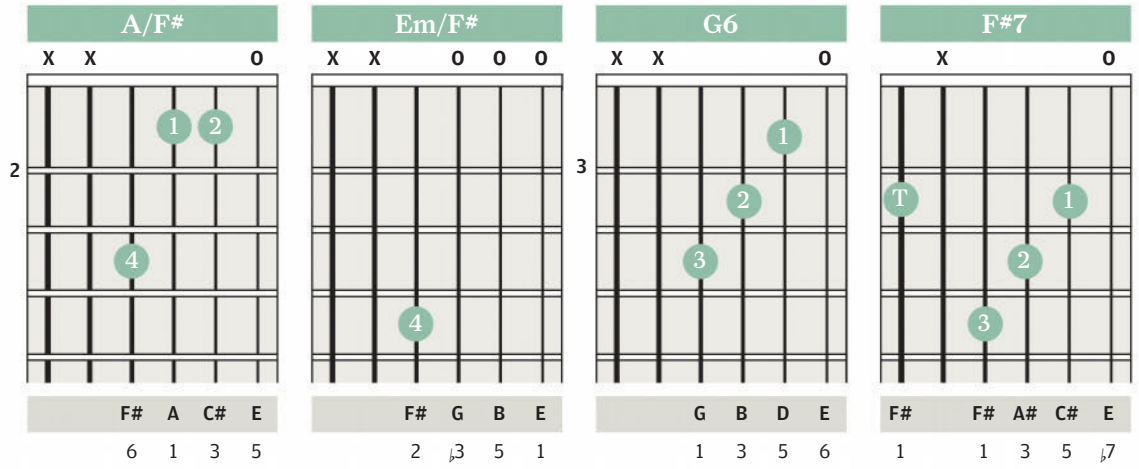
Your mission, should you choose to accept it: experiment with triads in different inversions over pedal notes and come up with some riffs of your own. See you next time!

Seventh heaven (Fig 4)



Bach for good (Fig 5)





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ECC81	10 Pcs	£7.80 Each	EL34 mk 2	16 Pcs	£12.90 Each
ECC82	10 Pcs	£7.80 Each	E34L	16 Pcs	£12.72 Each
ECC83-S	10 Pcs	£7.20 Each	EL84	16 Pcs	£7.80 Each
ECC83-S	20 Pcs	£6.60 Each	6L6GC	16 Pcs	£12.72 Each
ECC83-S	40 Pcs	£6.00 Each	6V6GTS	16 Pcs	£11.40 Each
ECC83-MG	10 Pcs	£9.60 Each	5881	16 Pcs	£12.60 Each
ECC83-MG	20 Pcs	£9.00 Each	6550	12 Pcs	£21.60 Each
5751	10 Pcs	£9.00 Each	KT88	12 Pcs	£22.80 Each

HARMA RETRO -CRYO SUPERIOR GRADE

The Harma Retro Cryo range recreates the classic sounds and designs of the most famous new old stock valves for a new generation of musician. So if you want an EL34 to crunch like an old Mullard or a 6L6GC to sing like a Sylvania. Then the Harma Cryo Retro range is the one for you.
All preamp valves are drive tested. All output valves are high plate volt drive tested under full working conditions for maximum reliability. Used by the industry's biggest names including Brian May, Thunder, Iron Maiden and the We Will Rock You shows worldwide.

ECC83-Retro Cryo	£21.60	KT66- Retro Cryo	£48.00
EL34-Retro Cryo	£24.00	5U4GB- Retro Cryo	£24.00
EL84-Retro Cryo	£24.00	6550A-Retro Cryo	£34.56
EZ81-Retro Cryo	£24.00	6L6GC-Retro Cryo	£24.00
GZ34- Retro Cryo	£26.40	6550A-Retro Cryo	£34.56

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Keeley KE-808 Ltd Ed	£159	Keeley 1962x Ltd Edition	£159
Keeley Red Dirt Overdrive 2	£155	Keeley Java Boost OC44	£178
Keeley Luna Overdrive 2	£180	Keeley Time Machine Boost	£195

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Gain rated Marshall Preamp revalve kits

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	3 Valve	4 Valve	5 Valve	7 Valve
Low Gain 55	£51.84	£67.20	£82.56	£113.28
Low Gain 40	£47.04	£62.40	£77.76	£108.48
Medium Gain 15	£48.00	£63.36	£78.72	£109.44
Standard Gain	£48.00	£63.36	£78.72	£116.28
High Gain	£51.84	£69.12	£86.40	£128.52

ORIGINAL USA MADE - PHILIPS

These valves are made with the highest quality materials and the tightest quality control as specified by the US Government. They are also the best sounding valves which outperform and out last their modern counter parts. They also help your amp reach it true potential which is why NOS valves are the most sought after by studios and professional musicians.

ECC81-12AT7	£12.00	EL84-6BQ5	£48.00	6SL7WGT	£24.00
ECC82-5814A	£19.20	5U4GB	£36.00	6V66T	£28.00
ECC83-5751	£36.00	5Y3WGTA	£24.00	6X4WA	£14.40
ECC83-12AX7	£54.00	6C4WA	£9.60	7199	£36.00
ECF82-6U8A	£9.60	6L6WBG-5881	£36.00	12BH7A	£36.00

HARMA SUPERIOR GRADE

Our own brand, the best selected and tested valves in the industry. All preamp valves are drive tested. All output valves are high plate volt tested under full working conditions for maximum reliability.
Used by the industries biggest names including Brian May, Thunder, Iron Maiden and the We Will Rock You shows worldwide.

ECC81-STR	£14.40	EL84/E84L burst tested	£21.60
ECC83-STR	£14.40	EL84 Retro	£18.00
ECC83-7025-STR	£14.40	5881-Mil Spec	£19.20
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EL34 Retro	£21.60	6L6GC-Retro	£21.60
EL84/E84L Standard	£18.00	GZ34-Retro	£21.60

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Groove tubes are one of the most respected valve brands in the World. Combine this with Watford Valves' special test facilities and you get distortion rated output valves which are burst tested and dual matched on current and gain and pre amp valves which are selected for low microphonics and drive tested for premium performance.
These valves are called Super Premium as you get the best GT available.

GT	Standard	Super Premium	GT	Standard	Super Premium
12AX7-M	£16.80	£22.50	6L6GC-R	£21.60	£24.00
5751-M	£16.80	£22.50	6L6GC-GE	£24.00	£27.00
ECC83-S	£16.80	£20.70	6L6GC-S	£24.00	£26.40
EL34-M	£19.20	£21.60	6V6GT-R	£19.20	£21.60
EL84-S	£14.40	£16.80	6V6GT-S	£24.00	£26.40

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J McLachlan said "**Simply the best speaker I have ever used**" after fitting the Harma Bright Sapphire in his Fender Deluxe reverb.

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: DIY bass project, getting into hot water in the kitchen and more test pilots please...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Home-brew bass

Dear *G&B*, I thought you may be interested in my Hofner bass project...

I bought the body at the NEC guitar show in the 90s. There was a pile of bass bodies being sold, nearly all were semis and I thought beyond my skills, but one stood out – it was ugly and cheap. "It's a Razorwood," I was told as money changed hands.

The first incarnation was as a six-string, left-handed, EMG, trem, three Kent Armstrong Texas pickups and a repaired Tele neck.

It lasted like this for a while until the neck came off for a hollowbody Telecaster (my skills had improved) and the hardware to a SRV S-type.

The body went into a drawer at work with ideas of a 12-string or buzz bridge sitar. With this in mind, I recarved the upper sections and lower horn.

And so it sat for several years until a conversation with my friend Pete over some period-correct bass parts for one of his projects revealed he had a Hofner neck and rewound pickup. The lightbulb went on and we reconvened to check if my body and his neck would marry up. It looked right. Pete helped with the neck pocket and added to the neck heel area to get a good fit, as the neck was probably from a Senator or Committee.

The main problem I faced concerned how best to anchor the strings and get a good break angle over the bridge with a tailpiece that looked right. I decided to design a flush-fit brass anchor block that followed the body curves. Then in stepped Bob, whose router and laser guide cut a stepped well in the correct position.

I then moulded a resin block that another friend, Simon, could roughly machine out of brass. I hand-finished the block and neck plate and made an inlaid brass plate to cover the trem rout. A tortie sheet was cut for the rear spring cavity and scratchplate. I gave the headstock a mahogany veneer and finished the body with Danish oil.

The pickup had been rewound by Bare Knuckle, and I wired it with a simple volume and tone with an Orange Drop cap.

A Razorwood truss-rod cover turned up on eBay and a Beatle bass bridge came from Germany. I found some repro pickup surrounds that just needed tapping and grub screws, and along with a set of Gotoh machineheads everything was in place.

Strung up with flatwounds, it sounds like a sixties Hofner – a good solid thud but with a very defined note with a lot of 'air' around it – ideal for my band, The Sensational Ellis Connelly Band's forays into 60s retro-active music. We cover it all, from early jazz to Floyd and beyond, and my main squeeze – an Ibanez 1205 – does most, but for that early-60s sound you do need a Hofner.

John Reed, via email

***G&B** Thanks for getting in touch and sharing the details of your DIY project John, it's certainly a unique creation! Have any other readers have undertaken similarly radical home-build projects? Let us know...*

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

Then you are the lucky winner of an Orange Crush PiX mini amp, featuring switchable overdrive, a built-in tuner and the Brit amp legend's timeless cosmetics.

Visit **www.orangeamps.com** for the full spec.

ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

If you can't stand the heat

Hi *G&B*, I was really pleased to see Huw was back working on his Gretsch [Workshop, *G&B* August 2016]. I've really been amazed and intrigued to see how he's taken that thing apart and reused absolutely everything. However, I was disappointed when I fell off my couch in a fit of laughter upon reading: "most kitchen work surfaces are pretty flat so I taped some SandBlaster paper to the worktop…"

Huw, if you have a wife don't ever let her go, she is one in a million. If you used to have a wife, well it's obvious why you don't anymore! Excellent mag guys, please keep it technical. I don't know why I enjoy reading about various humbucker outputs and wood glues, etc, but I do and your work is appreciated!

Dan, via email

G&B ***Despite a house full of cardboard boxes, a kitchen that doubles as a guitar and amp tech's workbench and a washing line that's often used to spray and dry guitar bodies, Mr Price remains a happily married man…***

Real-world reviews

Congratulations on a great mag! I've been reading *Guitar & Bass* for the last decade and in recent times it's been getting better with every issue. I particularly enjoy your guitar, amp and pedal reviews, because they're always very in-depth and honest about the products you're testing, whether they're great or not!

However, I wonder whether you've ever considered bringing in a second opinion from some famous guitarists who've tried the gear 'in the real world' – on stage, on the tourbus, in the studio, etc – sort of like a celebrity test drive. I think it would add an extra dimension to the reviews to be able to read about guitarists putting the gear through its paces on a daily basis. Just a thought. Keep up the good work.

Dave Wood, via email

G&B ***What can we say, Dave? Great minds think alike! We recently sent a new product out on the summer festival circuit with a guitarist in a successful UK band. Watch this space for his first report in a future issue of Guitar & Bass.***

HAVE YOUR SAY! Write to us via snail mail, *Guitar & Bass, Anthem Publishing, Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL* or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com.** Alternatively, get in touch via social media on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

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G&L

"G&L Guitars are the best instruments I ever made"
~ Leo Fender

George Fullerton & Leo Fender with an early G&L c.1979.

Together they created many, if not most of the world's most iconic and used guitars. The culmination of their work, including a number of patented designs, appear as G&L Guitars. Regarding their final venture on this project George is on record as saying.

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The sound they searched for, for over forty years was finally achieved with Leo's patented Magnetic Field Design pick ups which are only made in Fullerton, California, USA yet these ground-breaking pick ups are also available on very affordable Tribute series models too. Richer, lower background noise and with higher output than available previously - try before you buy another brand guitar.

(Available on all G&L designs apart from Legacy which Feature Alnico pick ups.)

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New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

Teenage Fanclub

HERE

The bucolic cover art for Teenage Fanclub's 10th studio album, and the first release from the Scottish band for six years, says it all. A laid-back vibe runs through almost everything on *Here*. Their trademark harmonies and jangly guitars are all present and correct on *I'm In Love* and *Thin Air*, and a slick, double-tracked guitar solo elevates the former. As you'd expect by now, the Big Star and Byrds influences are never too far away, particularly on *I Have Nothing More To Say*, while the trippy acoustic ballad *Steady State* has an early-70s Laurel Canyon feel. The pretty, strumalong *Hold On* showcases their disciplined songcraft and the band claim to have invented a new genre on *I Was Beautiful When I Was Alive* – Kraut-folk-rock. Elsewhere, though, it's business as usual. **SH**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Big Star, The Byrds*

Dinosaur Jr

GIVE A GLIMPSE OF WHAT YER NOT

Can it really be 31 years since Dinosaur Jr unleashed the sonic onslaught of their debut album, *Dinosaur*? J Mascis and co show they've lost none of that lust for noise on their fourth release since reuniting in 2005. Amid the never-more-meaty rhythm playing and joyously expressive soloing, there are bag loads of breezy grunge-pop melodies that remind us this is a band that inspired a generation of pop-punk and indie bands to go forth and make a wonderful racket. The wistful *Lost All Day* and *Mirror* are standout moments, while the wanton soloing as *I Walk For Miles* powers to its conclusion is just about as much fun as you can have with a set of headphones on. Lou Barlow takes vocal duties on two self-penned tracks here – *Love Is...* and *Left/Right*, adding some considered light and shade to a truly great record. **GW**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *J Mascis, Pixies*

Neil Young

EARTH

As idiosyncratic as ever, Neil Young's latest live album adds to the traditional crowd noises with recordings of insects, animals and the natural world. Spread over two discs, these 13 songs were taken from his recent *Rebel Content* tour with California band Promise Of The Real. It's a diverse set, from the hymnal *Mother Earth* to the righteous ire of Young in full-on electric mode – with his trusty Old Black cranked right up – for *Seed Justice* and *My Country Home*. The new material holds up pretty well, but the main thrills in this collection are provided by rarely aired gems such as *Western Hero*, *Vampire Blues* and *Hippie Dream*. This is a Neil Young concert performance, of course, so Young keeps the closing track, *Love And Only Love*, tight and snappy – it's a mere 28 minutes long here. **SH**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Band Of Horses, Bob Dylan*

Airbourne

BREAKIN' OUTTA HELL

The Aussie rockers are back with a no holds barred, balls to the wall album. Keeping to the tradition of their debut record *Runnin' Wild*, Airbourne take the energetic rock 'n' roll pace into overdrive for *Breakin' Outta Hell*. Songs such as *When I Drink I Go Crazy* and *Thin The Blood* show they're a cut above your average meat and potatoes rockers and know how to write a huge classic-rock song. **TT**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *AC/DC, Thin Lizzy*

The Cadillac Three

BURY ME IN MY BOOTS

Despite finding fame easier to come by in the UK than their homeland, Nashville's Cadillac Three have made a quintessentially American record in *Bury Me In My Boots*. With titles including *Drunk Like You*, *Party Like You*, *Ship Faced* and *Soundtrack To A Six Pack*, it's a Southern-rock affair with all the bar-room anthems and bottom-of-the-whisky-glass laments you'd expect... and few surprises. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Kings Of Leon, Lynyrd Skynyrd*

King Creosote

ASTRONAUT MEETS APPLEMAN

40 albums in, Scottish singer-songwriter Kenny Anderson remains a beguiling creative force. Perhaps known best for his recent collaboration with Jon Hopkins, the ambient *Diamond Mind*, this is more typical of Anderson's previous solo work. It's a beatific set where analogue is juxtaposed with digital. Delightful fingerpicking, bagpipes and harps combine on a collection that unfolds from the mesmeric seven-minute *You Just Want*. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Belle And Sebastian, James Yorkston*

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PAUL SAYER

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

Backstage at Download festival, The Temperance Movement guitarist talks old guitars, advice from a Rolling Stone and clean hands...

1 I couldn't live without...
"My Telecaster. It's a '73 and it was the first guitar that I ever played. It was my dad's. When I see other people play them, I love ES-335s and stuff like that but when I play... that's the one that makes sense to me."

2 In another life I would be...
"Honestly, I don't know. I got into it really young and I can't imagine doing anything else."

3 The moment that started it all...
"My dad was really into music. When I was really young when I'd get put to bed at 6pm or whatever, my dad would have people over and they'd be playing records and stuff downstairs and I could hear it. So it was a gradual thing, but it was growing up around music."

4 The one that got away...
"I bought a '65 Gibson Melody Maker on a whim, but I ended up using it loads on our latest record. When we did our last day of recording, I got home at like 5am. I had loads of guitars and when I went back out to the car to get the last load, someone had taken a guitar off the back seat. Someone had just seen it, grabbed it and legged it. It was almost poetic, I feel like that guitar was sent to me to make that record!"

5 My Spinal Tap moment
"Just now, we were waiting to go onstage and there was a dragon wheeled past us."

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"I'm going to namedrop here, but Keith Richards said to me, 'Just make sure you keep it together'. And it was pretty insightful... At the time, we'd been away for four months. It's the best job in the world, but you can start to go a bit mad, especially living with four other guys."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"If I'm shopping for a new guitar, the sign of one I want to buy is it makes me play something I haven't played before. In the scheme of things, what people care about are songs, not licks. If I start playing what could become the basis of a song, I think, maybe there's something in this guitar for me."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Though it seems impossible, for ages I've been trying to get those Swarfega wipes on the rider. I just like having clean hands."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"Everything I listen to could be a surprise to fans! Obviously, I'm a huge fan of The Stones, the Faces and Free. But I grew up wanting to be the guitar player in Bonnie Raitt's band, or Jackson Browne's, or to do something like Crosby, Stills & Nash. But I love James Blake, Radiohead... I just like good music, as much as that is a cliché."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"I'd love to be able to play flamenco guitar. My wife is Spanish and we spend a bit of time out there. I love it – it's so guitar-based, but it's a mile away from what I do or am able to do..."

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

Stand Out in the Crowd

System 10 Stompbox Digital Wireless Guitar System

The innovative digital wireless guitar system from Audio-Technica that fits right on your pedal board. Pair up to 8 guitars with separate body pack transmitters for easy on stage changeovers, and either mute, tune or use a second rig with the A-B switching. With a discreet clip bodypack, sturdy metal pedal casing, and no large intrusive aerials, it is ready to go straight from the box to the stage. Operating on the 2.4GHz range, it is also both interference and wireless license free.

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Albert Hammond Jr. – The Strokes

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